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***“Facebook is my second home”***

# **The Kurdish Diaspora’s Use of Facebook in Shaping a Nation**

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# Abstract

**This study strives to understand the use of Facebook as a social network site by the Kurdish diaspora. Academic relevance and expertise is primarily a requirement for basic study, while the social context is drawn into applied study, and these two contexts puts the research question into primary focus. Accordingly, the main purpose of the study is to explore how Kurds search for and express their ethnic identity through Facebook. The Kurdish people have been suppressed by four countries—Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria—for centuries and have thus been forced to cope with Turkish, Arabic, and Persian ethnic identity and forbidden to express Kurdish ethnic identity. This study reveals some of the most importance objectives and motivations behind the use of Facebook for Kurds in Norway and shows how Facebook features have been used to rekindle ties between the Kurds and to strengthen their ethnic identity. The Kurdish diaspora has been spread worldwide and the most effective way for the people to connect to each other in the diaspora is through social networking sites. Kurds in the diaspora make extensive use of social media to build ethnic identity. The empirical part presents a qualitative research method in the form of an open interview with eight informants of Kurdish background living in Norway. The purpose of the chosen research method was to get the informants' experiences and thoughts about their use of Facebook as a Kurd in the diaspora. The information gathered from the interview thus support the research questions in the study. The main findings of the study are that Kurds in the diaspora consider Facebook to be an important communication tool to strengthen their identity by discussing political issues and cultural aspects and reconnecting with friends and families they have lost contact with. They actively use Facebook to convey their identity by sharing national and common interests. Facebook is used to reinforce fellowship and association within the Kurdish diaspora.**

Key concepts: diaspora, the Kurdish diaspora, Kurds in Norway, Kurdish ethnic identity, social media and Facebook.

## **Sammendrag**

Denne studien handler om bruk av Facebook som et sosialt nettverk side av den kurdiske diasporaen. Faglig relevans og kompetanse er først og fremst et krav for grunnleggende studier, mens den sosiale konteksten trekkes inn i studien, og disse to sammenhengene setter problemstillingen i hovedfokus. Følgelig er det viktigste formålet med studien å undersøke hvordan kurdere søker etter og uttrykker sin etniske identitet gjennom Facebook. Det kurdiske folk har blitt undertrykt av fire land - Tyrkia, Irak, Iran og Syria - i århundrer. Kurdere har dermed blitt tvunget til å takle tyrkisk, arabisk og persisk etnisk identitet og blitt forbudt å uttrykke sin kurdiske etniske identitet. Denne studien avdekker de mest viktige formålene og motivasjonene bak bruken av Facebook for kurdere i Norge og viser hvordan Facebook-funksjoner har blitt brukt til å gjenopplive bånd mellom kurderne og for å styrke deres etniske identitet. Den kurdiske diasporaen har blitt spredd over hele verden og den mest effektive måten for folk å koble seg til hverandre i diaspora er gjennom sosiale nettverkssteder. Kurdere i diaspora gjør utstrakt bruk av sosiale medier for å bygge etnisk identitet. Den empiriske delen presenterer en kvalitativ forskningsmetode i form av et åpent intervju med åtte informanter med kurdisk bakgrunn som er bosatt i Norge. Formålet med den valgte forskningsmetoden var å få frem informantenes erfaringer og tanker om deres bruk av Facebook som en kurder i diaspora. Informasjonen som samles inn fra intervjuet vil dermed understøtte problemstillingene i studien. De viktigste funnene i studien er at kurdere i diaspora anser Facebook som et viktig kommunikasjonsverktøy for å styrke sin identitet ved å diskutere politiske saker og kulturelle aspekter og gjenoppta kontakten med venner og familie de har mistet kontakten med. De bruker Facebook aktivt til å formidle sin identitet ved å dele nasjonale og felles interesser. Facebook brukes for å forsterke fellesskapet og båndene innenfor den kurdiske diasporaen.

Sentrale begreper: diaspora, den kurdiske diasporaen, kurdere i Norge, kurdisk etnisk identitet, sosiale medier og Facebook.

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Purpose of this study .....	2
1.2	Research question.....	3
<b>2</b>	<b>Background.....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1	Historical views.....	5
2.1.1	Who are the Kurds? .....	5
2.1.2	Kurdistan geographically .....	7
2.1.3	Kurdistan historically.....	9
2.2	Key concepts .....	11
2.2.1	Diaspora .....	11
2.2.2	The Kurdish diaspora.....	13
2.2.3	Kurds in Norway.....	15
2.2.4	Kurdish identity .....	16
2.2.5	Social media and Facebook .....	18
<b>3</b>	<b>Literature review and discussions .....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1	Previous research.....	24
3.2	The beginning of media communication in the Kurdish diaspora 26	
3.3	Digital diaspora .....	31
3.4	Identity search in cyberspace .....	32

<b>4</b>	<b>Research methodology.....</b>	<b>37</b>
4.1	Qualitative research methodology.....	37
4.2	Qualitative research interviews.....	39
4.3	Interviewees .....	43
4.4	Reflexivity in the research process .....	45
4.5	Chapter conclusion.....	48
<b>5</b>	<b>Research results and discussion.....</b>	<b>50</b>
5.1	The importance of Facebook for Kurds in the diaspora .....	51
5.2	Political platforms on Facebook.....	53
5.3	Fellowship and association through Facebook .....	56
5.4	Censorship and controversy on Facebook .....	57
5.5	A sense of belonging in Facebook .....	62
5.6	Conveying Identity through Facebook.....	66
5.7	Cultural aspects publicized on Facebook.....	69
5.8	Reconnecting with lost contacts.....	71
<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>References .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>1</b>
8.1	The interview guide.....	1
8.2	Interview questions and answers.....	3

# 1 Introduction

Just a few years ago, the term “social media” had little meaning to many people in the world, especially to the Kurdish people, a nation without an independent state that has been prevented from maintaining its culture and identity. Social media is integrated technology and today serves as an effective communication tool for both individuals and organizations and as a new communication channel for openness, freedom, dialogue, and community participation. Social media as user-controlled channels allow people to generate their own content and share it with others. People use these channels extensively to share personal profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and other content. This study will focus on the Kurdish people in the diaspora as part of our digital society and how they use social media such as Facebook.

The study begins with historical views, part of chapter two, about the Kurds and Kurdistan to allow the reader to gather some important facts about an ethnic group that has been banned from expressing its identity. The key concepts presented later in the chapter support the chosen topic and the historical views. In chapter three, the literature review and discussions provide literature and information within subject areas such as Kurdish media history, diaspora in the digital age, and identity in cyberspace. Chapter four, research methodology, is considered an important part of this study and represents the different stages of the research process and the methods used to collect data. The study ends with the research results and discussion in chapter five, including the interview results, which are congruent with the study’s purpose, theory, objectives, and methods.

The introductory chapter is divided into two sections. The first describes the purpose of this study and the reasons for the chosen topic. The second section explains the main research question and further questions that support the main research question.

## **1.1 Purpose of this study**

We live in a world where technology is becoming an increasingly important part of our everyday life. Internet use has gone through generational change, and in recent years the development of new media and communication technologies has been enormously prominent in human lives. Social media as an important new communication technology has taken root in society and has become a natural part of everyday life for many. It has become an essential tool for keeping in touch with friends, families, and acquaintances, as well as for work.

Social media has become a significant part of our lives and is based on a basic need for human beings to communicate. People use social media such as Facebook to update their status, talk with friends, and stay updated on what is happening in their friends' lives. It has become a personal interest and more accessible and easier to use, and we effectively have the opportunity to communicate with friends and families online. Most people know more people than they have the opportunity to meet often and communicate with, and therefore they chose social media to enable long-distance communication with people around the world. Social media also enables users to build online communities. People have many reasons for using social media, such as to keep in touch with friends and families. Facebook, for example, can be used for creating or joining groups with people that have common interests, for sharing pictures and similar content, and for reconnecting with lost contacts. Some people even use Facebook to express themselves on wall posts, groups, and pages.

Many studies have explored the motives for and purposes of social media use, and this study explores the Kurdish diaspora, more specifically Kurds in Norway, and their use of social media and social activities in Facebook. As mentioned, social media has long been a form of communication for many people, and the Kurdish people are among millions of people worldwide who are using social media technology platforms.

In order to understand Kurds' use of social media, this study will discuss the importance of social media for Kurds in the diaspora and their use of Facebook as main social media to express identity. These themes emphasize theoretical



perspectives and previous research in the field of the Kurdish diaspora and their use of media and communication technology in the diaspora community in general, compared to the old media that was used previously in Kurdistan. This study presents qualitative research in the form of an interview with eight informants of Kurdish background discussing their use of Facebook.

The topics discussed in the interview are Facebook as a political platform, fellowship and association, sense of belonging, conveying identity, cultural aspects, reconnecting with lost contacts, censorship, and controversy on Facebook. These topics are based on the research question and supplementary questions explained in next section.

This study is academically relevant to my previous experience in the subject and particularly to my ethnic background as a Kurd and my separation from my homeland, family, and fellow Kurds. Thus, the academic relevance and the social context are the main purposes for my choosing this topic to study.

## **1.2 Research question**

Social media is used in different contexts by different people, and Facebook is one of the most popular forms of social media, with over one billion active users today. Many studies shows the motivation for and purpose of Facebook use by different populations, groups, and organizations, and this study focus on Kurdish people in the diaspora. The study presents and discusses motivations for how the Kurds make reconnect with their fellow Kurds in the diaspora. It also explores if Facebook has an impact on Kurds in rebuilding and strengthening their ethnic identity.

The most important research question of this study is to explore and examine whether and how Kurds in the diaspora express a common ethnic identity through Facebook. Supplementary questions to support the main research question are as follows: Which motives and purposes do Kurds in the diaspora have for using Facebook as a social networking site? How has Facebook become important for Kurds in the diaspora? What topics are often discussed by Kurds on Facebook? Is there a feeling of fellowship and association between Kurds on Facebook? Another important

supplementary question is whether and how Kurds have a sense of belonging and national identity by actively using Facebook to convey Kurdish identity.

In order to answer the main research question and the supplementary questions, I interviewed eight Kurds living in Norway to explore and understand their motivations and their use of Facebook. The interview contained thirteen questions based on the main research question.

## 2 Background

This chapter comprises two sections which present the background for this study. The first section presents a brief historical view of the Kurds and Kurdistan. Although it is only a historical overview and may not seem relevant, readers need to have some historical idea about the Kurds and their history through the years. Without this context, the rest of the study and the findings cannot be adequately explained because Kurdish history is unique in ways that many people may not know about. The next section presents the key concepts that are the main ideas for this study. The key concepts are defined to give a full understanding of the whole study.

### 2.1 Historical views

This section presents some important background history. The first question to emerge in when reading this study is *who are the Kurds?* Therefore, the first part of this chapter is about the Kurdish people, who they are, and their existence throughout the history. The following section is about the stateless Kurdistan, the land of Kurds, and is divided in two parts: geography and history.

#### 2.1.1 Who are the Kurds?

Many authors have written about the Kurds and each has slightly different views, which makes the subject very challenging to read about and explore. Anthropologists disagree about where the term “Kurd” comes from; all we know is that the term “Kurd” is over 3000 years old and was first recorded as an ethnic designation (Folkevord 2002, 38). However, it is quite obvious that the Kurds are a people of Indo-European origin who live in the generally contiguous areas of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, and Syria—a mountainous region in Southwest Asia generally known as “Kurdistan,” which means “land of the Kurds.” According to Mehrdad R. Izady, Kurdish author and political scientist, various peoples and tribes had settled in the area for thousands of years; many of these people merged together more than 2000 years ago and formed a new Kurdish ethnic pool. The Kurdish ethnic pool is an amalgam into which these people have been absorbed (Izady 1992, 74).

The Kurdish people are the world's largest stateless people (Meho and Maglaughlin 2001, 95) and the fourth largest ethnic minority in the Middle East, after Arabs, Turks, and Persians. Kurds have struggled for liberty for almost eighty years. The assimilation of these "mountain people" has shaped today's Kurds in genetic, cultural, social, and linguistic ways. Folkevord build on Mehrdad R. Izady's claim that today's variations in race, traditions, and dialects point back to this complex identity (Folkevord 2002, 38). The Kurds have been affected by new cultural changes, and Kurdish cultural and ethnic identity has been most influenced by the Iranian people. In addition, major parts of Kurdistan were characterized by the "Islamization" of the seventh century by the Arab people (Folkevord 2002, 39).

The geographical term "Kurdistan" has been used since the 1100s, and according to David McDowall, the area became bigger as more Kurds moved into Kurdistan. They moved to the Aras River, the border between modern Turkey and Armenia and between Iran and Azerbaijan. They also moved to west of Sivas in Turkey, and Kermanshah in today's Iran, and the area around Kirkuk in today's Iraq (Folkevord and Melå 2002, 39; McDowall 1997). Thus, Kurdistan is a strategic area located in the geographic heart of the Middle East. It is difficult to delineate Kurdistan, but today the region includes southern and eastern Turkey from the base of the Taurus Mountains in the west to Mt. Ararat in the east, parts of northern Syria, northeastern Iraq, part of Armenia, and the western part of Iran. Although there has been some mixing with other nations through the centuries, the Kurds still have a common cultural background and identity (Edmonds 1971, 88). Edmonds further argues that

The Kurds have outlived the rise and fall of many imperial races: Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Mongols, and Turks. They have their own history, language, and culture. Their country has been unjustly partitioned. But they are the original owners, not strangers to be tolerated as minorities with limited concessions granted at the whim of the usurpers. (ibid.)

Kurdish intellectuals have always asserted their identity, their culture, their language, and their country. This has not always been easy, but they have nonetheless confirmed and emphasized their identity by being active in all these areas. As a result,

they have been forced to leave their homeland, and without any Kurdish state, the Kurdish population was forced into exile in foreign countries and settled in those countries they were divided among.

About 30 million Kurds live predominantly in the Middle East (Sheyholislami, Kurdish Identity, Discourse, and New Media 2011, 2) and are dispersed mostly among four main countries in the Kurdish areas. According to the website The World Factbook,<sup>1</sup> more than 14 million Kurds live in Turkey (25% of the Turkish population),<sup>2</sup> 8 million in Iran (10%),<sup>3</sup> 6 million in Iraq (23%),<sup>4</sup> 2 million in Syria (9%),<sup>5</sup> 1.5 million in Europe, and more than 1 million in other countries.

### **2.1.2 Kurdistan geographically**

Many history books and much research about the geography of Kurdistan have been written and almost all of them come to the same conclusion: Kurdistan contains parts of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. That is to say, geographers have not yet designated Kurdistan as a separate country and an independent state. Thus, it can be a bit difficult for authors and researchers to describe the geography of Kurdistan since it is divided among several countries. Kurdistan has not yet been given its own borders, like we find in other countries in the world, and hence this leads to the appearance of several opinions and discussions among academics, writers, and geographers.

What is obvious is that geographical Kurdistan is located in Southwest Asia, in the geographic heart of the Middle East. Today, it comprises important parts of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria (Meho and Maglaughlin 2001, 3). Kurdistan's northern part is shared between Armenia and Turkey, its southeastern part is divided with Iraq and Iran, and its western part is in Syria. These parts were created on two different

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<sup>1</sup> The World Factbook provides information on the history, people, government, economy, geography, communications, transportation, military, and transnational issues for 267 world entities. URL [<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>]

<sup>2</sup> (The World Factbook - Turkey 2013)

<sup>3</sup> (The World Factbook - Syria 2013)

<sup>4</sup> (The World Factbook - Iraq 2013)

<sup>5</sup> (The World Factbook - Syria 2013)

occasions. The first time was when Kurdistan was divided in 1514 (see chapter 2.1.3) between the Ottoman and Persian empires following the battle of Chaldiran. The second time was in 1920–1923 when France and Britain further altered the political contours of Kurdistan by dividing Ottoman Kurdistan among Turkey, Syria, and Iraq (Meho and Maglaughlin 2001, 11–12).

Estimates of the area of the land where the Kurds constitute the dominant majority range from 230,000 to 300,000 square miles in size, divided as follows: Turkey (43% of the total area of Kurdistan), Iran (31%), Iraq (18%), Syria (6%), Armenia and Azerbaijan (2%) (ibid.).



Figure 1: Map of Kurdistan

### 2.1.3 Kurdistan historically

The Kurdish people have been surrounded by political action and agendas at various levels since 1514 when Kurdistan was first divided between *Persia* and *the Ottoman Empire* (Folkevord 2002, 45). Some rebels and leaders have attempted to liberate Kurdistan throughout history; the first attempt was in 1880 by Sheikh Ubeydûllah. Ubeydûllah's rebellion is considered the first attempt to create a Kurdish state. In 1880 he wrote a letter to England's vice consul Clayton, including this part:

The Kurdish nation is a distinct people with their own religion, rules and customs. ...The leaders and rulers of Kurdistan, whether Turkish or Persian underlings and citizens of Kurdistan (the Christians), are all united and agree that things cannot continue as it is today with two governments, and that something necessarily need to be done. Then European states which have understood the problem should help us to establish our own state. . . . We require taking matters into our hands . . . otherwise the whole Kurdistan stand up and take things into their own hands...<sup>6</sup>

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the dissolution of the Persian and the Ottoman Empires that had divided Kurdistan, and Kurdish nationalism emerged with the ending of World War I.

Another important incident in Kurdish political history was in the 1920s when Mustafa Kemal, known as Atatürk, came to Kurdistan in May 1919 and presented himself as “the savior of Kurdistan” (Folkevord 2002, 61). Atatürk was from Greece—under the Ottoman Empire at the time—and he established the Turkish Republic after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire right after World War I and became the first president of Turkey. Atatürk promised to grant the Kurds autonomy and give them the same rights as the Turks and the Greeks. But he managed to break his promise when he declared the Turkish Republic on October 29, 1923, and removed all referring to Kurdistan from public documents and reference work for Kurdish autonomy (Folkevord 2002, 68).

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<sup>6</sup> Letter to Vice Consul Clayton in July 1880. Olson 1989, p. 2 jfr. Ahmadzadeh 1998, p. 40 (Folkevord 2002, 52)

The Kurdish political situation became worse after that, especially for Kurds from northern Kurdistan, even though the idea of Kurdish liberation was kept alive through the years until today. The Kurds were denied use of the Kurdish language, identifying themselves as Kurds, representing their own culture, and participating in political action. Many Kurdish political activists were jailed and excluded and all established Kurdish organizations were repeatedly closed down. This led to more and more Kurds, especially young Kurds, attempting to be politically active over the years and thus prove their nationality. The attempt to establish a free Kurdistan can only be achieved through political activities. Thus, the political situation has played a large role in Kurdish history and especially identity.

Alynn J. Lyon and Emek M. Uçarer, political scientists and immigration researchers, claim that Kurds have not been allowed to express their culture and language for many years by all the states in which they reside and are still being denied in some parts of Kurdistan. Kurdish access to political representation has been quelled by policies of assimilation and repression (Lyon and Uçarer 2005, 63).



## 2.2 Key concepts

This section introduces the three key concepts that are used in this study: *diaspora*, *identity*, and *Facebook*. The chapter first gives an introduction about what a diaspora is and how a group can be identified as a diaspora. This has been described by scholars who have explored the meaning of diaspora. After defining diaspora, the next part presents the background of the Kurdish diaspora; it gives some basic information about the Kurdish people who live outside their homeland, where they can be found, and the number of Kurds in Europe. This leads to next part about Kurds in Norway. The interviewees are Kurds who live in Norway, and therefore it was necessary to write a short presentation about the Kurds who have fled to Norway. The following part introduces Kurdish ethnic identity, or the important features a nation or a minority group can be identified with. The final key concept is presented in the last part of this section, which is about social media in general and about Facebook.

### 2.2.1 Diaspora

The term “diaspora” is described differently by many scholars. Diaspora is an old social and political phenomenon. Looking up the word *diaspora* in the dictionary, and you find two descriptions:<sup>7</sup>

1. The dispersal of a people outside their homeland.
2. A people, collectively, that lives in dispersed areas outside its homeland.

Further investigation of the word “diaspora” finds that it comes from the Greek verb *diaspeirein*, meaning “to disperse, spread about,” made up of the words “through, apart” and “to sow, scatter.” According to Steven Bruce and Steve Yearley, professors of the sociology of scientific knowledge, “diaspora” denotes a people that has been dispersed or displaced from their original homelands and place of living. The term diaspora was originally used to describe the Jewish diaspora—Jews who were spread

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<sup>7</sup> (Diaspora: Alpha Dictionary 2013)

out into smaller communities around the world and lived outside their original communities (Yearley and Bruce 2006, 71).

In 1986 Gabriel Sheffer described modern diasporas as “ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands” (Sheffer 1986)<sup>8</sup>. Hence, “diaspora” refers to the spread of religious or ethnic groups from their homelands, whether forced or voluntary. Members of a diaspora resettle in a new place and retain connections to each other and their cultural and religious traditions. The common features of diaspora members bind them in collective action. Jennifer Brinkerhoff defines diaspora as sharing of the following features among the migrant groups:

1. Dispersion, whether voluntary or involuntary, across sociocultural boundaries and at least one political.
2. A collective memory and myth about the homeland created and recreated across distances and generations.
3. A commitment to keeping the homeland – imagined or otherwise alive through symbolic and purposive expression in the hostland and/or in the homeland.
4. The presence of the issue of return, though not necessarily a commitment to do so. The idea of return may be explored, discussed, and debated with or without specific intention of physical return.
5. A diasporic consciousness and associated identity hybridity, expressed, in part, through the creation of diaspora associations or organizations. (Brinkerhoff 2009, 31)

According to this list of common features, members of a diaspora identify with each other as a dispersed group that lives outside its homelands but maintains common ties to the homeland. They reinforce their communication and rebuild their identity with their countrymen. According to Internet studies scholar Andoni Alonso and migration and diaspora researcher Pedri J. Oiarzabal, immigration becomes a question of identity in many circumstances, and it is called *diasporic* process since the term

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<sup>8</sup> Sheffer, Gabriel, *A New Field of Study: Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), 1-15, quoted in *Digital Diaspora, Identity and Transnational Engagement* (Cambridge, New York, Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, 2009), 29.

“diaspora” “conveys different meanings and includes historical phenomena such as globalization, trans-localities, and the crisis of the traditional state” (Oiarzabal and Alonso 2010, 7).

Consequently, a diaspora is defined as a group which must have a common myth about their homeland, idealize it, and be willing to support it (Ratha and Plaza 2011, 4-3). Such a group must also have plans to go back, have a strong ethnic identity and a strong sense of ethnic solidarity, and show solidarity with their diaspora members in other countries. Another important factor is probably the degree of organization of this group, both in the new host country and internationally.

The history of mankind has included a number of diaspora, and some historians have made the phenomenon their focus of study. To be driven away from their homeland and culture can be a deeply significant event in the life of an individual and his or her culture, so the study of diaspora is very important. Many ethnic groups have been forced or induced to leave their homelands for a variety of social, economic, and political reasons. The Kurds are one of these groups.

### **2.2.2 The Kurdish diaspora**

The exile of the Kurdish people is comprehended as “an increasingly important dimension of Kurdish history and particularly of the advance of Kurdish national solidarity” (McDowall 2004, 455). Kurdish migration spread into many countries, mostly to Europe. David McDowall, British author of several editions of *A Modern History of the Kurds*, divides Kurdish exile into three historical phases: post-1945 exiles, economic migrants, and the refugee decades between 1980 and 2000 (McDowall 2004, 457). In the first phase, many Kurds fled to the Arab world since it was a less intolerant environment for exile Kurds, and in the 1960s, many young Kurdish intellectuals fled to Europe for their education. In the second phase, during the 1970s, many migrant workers from Turkey, including Kurds and others, drifted to Europe due to economic issues. In the third phase, hundreds of thousands of Kurds were forced to abandon their homes due conflicts between the Kurdish communities in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey starting in 1980 (McDowall 2004, 457). At this time, more

than 500,000 Kurds lived in Europe, and this number exceeded 750,000 by 1999. Most of the Kurds from Iraq fled to Britain, Kurds from Turkey fled to Germany, and Kurds from Iran fled to France (ibid.). According to McDowall, the pattern and importance of exile had been transformed by the end of the twentieth century, and “the Kurdish Diaspora had become a key instrument for the advancement of Kurdish national identity and for its internationalisation” (McDowall 2004, 455).

These numbers of Kurdish emigration are extremely different today. It is difficult to accurately estimate the total number of Kurds, but according to many sources there are more than 38 million Kurds in the world. Emigration has produced a Kurdish diaspora of approximately 14 million. Most of them live in the largest cities in Turkey, Iran, and Syria, and around 1.3 million Kurds live in Western Europe, with the largest number in Germany (Johnston 2006). There are also large groups in France, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland).

The Kurdish diaspora has a large number of people who have preserved their ethnic identity and nationality, and they are spread out over many countries, including the four main countries Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, with a large number spread out over Europe and other parts of the world. But no matter where in the world they are located, they have always obtained resources to strengthen their identity so they can be reunited with their homeland. The Kurds are not a nation, but they are a society that is constantly changing, and the most effective way that has helped the Kurds to stay connected to each other in the last 15 years is social network sites. Facebook, among many other social network sites, is used by diasporas as a new arena for several purposes: to reunite with family and friends at home and around the world, to strengthen their identity and sense of belonging, and for political and public activities. The same objectives also apply in the Kurds’ case, as a relatively new transnational society.

### 2.2.3 Kurds in Norway

Norway is one of the European countries that have received Kurdish refugees for many years. Kurds have fled to the country because of political, social, and economic problems. It is difficult to find accurate statistics about when and how many Kurds have fled to Norway, and even current numbers are impossible to find. The reason is simple: they are not a nation yet, and they are not counted as an ethnic group since they do not own a state. The Kurdish refugee group is calculated with the Iraqi, Turk, Iranian, and Syrian populations. Their identity and background is classified with these four countries. Even the Norwegian statistics agency SSB (Statistics Norway) lacks numbers and statistics to estimate the number of Kurds as an ethnic group in Norway.<sup>9</sup>

According to an article (Kadripour 2012) by the organization “Med Kurdistan for fred,” Kurds in Norway can be divided in two groups. The first group has been in Norway since the 1980s and even earlier, and their second generation was born or has grown up in Norway. The other group contains Kurdish asylum seekers and refugees who came to the country at the beginning of the 1990s.

Many Kurds, especially from the first group, have managed to integrate well into Norwegian society; many of them have completed higher education, taken jobs in their profession or other lines of work, and strongly and powerfully integrated into the Norwegian community. But at the same time they also participate in the large Kurdish diaspora community in Norway. Even though Kurds have strongly integrated into Norwegian society, they still retain a strong connection with their own countrymen both in Norway and in their homeland. There will always be a sense of belonging with their ethnic identities, language, culture, myths, and the place where their roots come from. But this can also vary between the new generation which was born or has been raised in Norway and the old generation which has lived half of their lives in the homeland and half of their lives in Norway. This transformation has a huge influence on the identity of Kurds in the hostland, as Brinkerhoff claims:

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<sup>9</sup> I contacted SSB (Statistics Norway) and asked specifically for statistics of Kurds living in Norway, but they are unfortunately not available.

Diaspora identity encompasses important distinctions: between those who have migrated and those who remain in the home country; between those who assimilate whole-heartedly and those who retain identification with the homeland; among generations of settlement; and among those who identify with a subset of the homeland culture versus the homeland as a whole. (Brinkerhoff 2009, 32)

Brinkerhoff calls this mix of identity and characteristics a *hybrid identity* because the people in the diaspora are affected by the combination of identities from their homeland, their hostland, and their lived experience (Brinkerhoff 2009, 33). This leads to some variation in the reinforcement of the strong ties among the Kurds with their countrymen and homeland. Some Kurds have created powerful ties and connections with their own people and built a strong Kurdish ethnic identity and some less so.

## **2.2.4 Kurdish identity**

“Kurd” is a term of national identity, but it is also a term of ethnic identity. The meaning of national identity is the sharing of feelings of belonging to a cultural or national group. As Jaffer Sheyholislami, Kurdish linguist and discourse theorist, states, “National identity is a social construct, but it has historical and ethnic roots, even if such roots often are invented” (Sheyholislami 2010, 291). An ethnic identity is also defined “as a group possessing a collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity” by Anthony Smith<sup>10</sup>.

When we read or hear about ethnic identity, we quickly think about a few common characteristics of a group that identifies them as an ethnic group, usually language, culture, and religion. But if we go deeper in defining ethnic identity, we find

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno, University of Nevada Press, 1993), 15-16, quoted in, Maria T. O’Shea *Trapped Between the Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan* (London: Routledge, 2004), 36.

similarities that are expressed in music, values, art, practice, literature, lifestyle, rituals, food, names, and customs, along with language, culture, and religion. Many historians, authors, and journalists have analyzed Kurdish identity and history.

McDowall defines Kurdish identity as an ethnic group with its own language and culture, living in a geographically area, and refusing the cultural assimilation which others seek to impose upon them (McDowall 2004, 4). The common definition of Kurdish identity could be defined as a shared culture, language, territory, set of symbols, memory and experience, and future political aspirations (Sheyholislami 2011, 47).

According to McDowall, Kurdish people had existed as an identifiable group for possibly more than 2000 years, but it was only in the early years of the twentieth century that they acquired the sense of national community as Kurds (McDowall 2004, 2). Accordingly, Kurds still see themselves as a rightful nation, but a nation that has been torn apart, without a state, and whose calling it is to establish its own national state, be it federate or independent (Kreyenbroek and Alliso 1996, 9).

Thus, as all other ethnic groups, the Kurdish people have also their own ethnic identity, although it has been defined as a stateless and split identity based on four homeland affiliations rooted in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria (Akman 2009). These four countries and great powers who have occupied Kurdistan have constantly tried to prevent Kurds from maintaining their culture and identity (Karbasiyan 2013, 9).

One of the main markers of ethnic and national identity is language. The Kurdish language is held as one of the most important and salient manifestations of Kurdish identity. The Kurdish language consists of several dialects, and two major dialects exist today: Kurmanji spoken by most northern Kurds, and Surani spoken by most southern Kurds. There are two other related dialects called Gurani and Zaza, spoken in northwestern Kurdistan (McDowall 2004, 10).

## 2.2.5 Social media and Facebook

The Internet and digital technology have had more impact than any other technological innovations in the last few decades. Although Tim Berners-Lee<sup>11</sup> knew well what he was doing when he was writing the first http protocols in 1989, he could hardly have predicted how large and rapid the spread of the Internet and the technologies that use the network structure was going to be. The first Web (WWW) was originally conceived and developed for scientists in universities and institutes to share information and exchange files.<sup>12</sup>

The Internet as we know it today is hugely important to many, in virtually all aspects of daily life. Finn Raben, ESOMAR<sup>13</sup> Director General, describes the Internet thusly:

The internet has revolutionized our world. It is at once a worldwide broadcasting capability, a mechanism for information collection and dissemination, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals without regard for race, religion, political orientation, social strata or geographic location. (Raben 2010, ix)

Clay Shirky, American writer, consultant, and teacher on the social and economic effects of Internet technologies, divides pre-Internet media into two types: broadcast media and communication media (Shirky 2008, 86). Broadcast media refers to radio, television, newspapers, and movies, which provide a one-way message from one sender to many receivers, called a one-to-many pattern (ibid.) and making it difficult for the receiver to say anything back (Aalen 2012, 14). Communications media such as telegrams, phone calls, and faxes are designed to facilitate two-way conversations. These are between one sender and one recipient, called a one-to-one pattern (Shirky

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<sup>11</sup> Tim Berners-Lee is a British computer scientist at CERN. He is best known for inventing the World Wide Web and for defining HTML (hypertext markup language), which is used to create web pages, HTTP (hypertext transfer protocol), and URLs (universal resource locators). The development of all these took place between 1989 and 1991. Tim Berners-Lee is now the manager of the World Wide Web Consortium, which represents the current development of the WWW (Mywebguider n.d.).

<sup>12</sup> CERN, "The birth of the web" (CERN n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> ESOMAR is the essential organization for encouraging, advancing, and elevating market research worldwide (ESOMAR 2013).



2008, 86-87). What we have today is many-to-many pattern which is a mix of both broadcasting media and communication media, and social media can be called a many-to-many pattern. Therefore, it is very important to look at social media because of its rapid growth. Social media is a phenomenon that comprises various forms of network services and different functions and uses. Both services and their uses are under constant development. The words “social media” might be new definition for network communication today, but we have been using technology that could have been called social media long before the existence of social media platforms such as Facebook. In the late 1960s, the Advanced Research Projects Agency’s ARPANET was developed by U.S. Department of Defense to move data files between military bases (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2006, 253). ARPANET quickly became a system to exchange messages and files or data. The service that emerged soon after ARPANET was e-mail, which we still use today with most of the same functions, such as saving or responding to messages or sending a message to a list of recipients (ibid.).

Furthermore, Bulletin Board Systems (BBS)<sup>14</sup> was developed, based on the type of discussion similar to what we know today as Usenet, dedicated to sharing and exchanging messages and files on a network. In the 1970s, text-based virtual worlds called *Multi-User Dungeons* (MUDs) were used for role-playing games. In the 1980s, *Internet Relay Chat* (IRC) was used for synchronous text-based conversations (Aalen 2012, 16). IRC chat is real-time communication between users, and the same can be said about the MUDs.

The social media that we have today enables users to register with a name or nickname and use a profile to communicate with friends and families, build networks, join groups and discuss different topics, share interests, links, photos, and videos, and debate in many more ways than ever before. Social media has had stronger growth than anyone could ever have imagined, and today it is available in all screen formats. You can remain anonymous, geographic distance does not matter, and you can feel the closeness and enjoy communicating with people around the world. Social distance

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<sup>14</sup> BBS is a computer system running software that allows users to connect and log in to the system using a terminal program. The first public dial-up BBS was developed by Ward Christensen in 1978 (BBS 2009).

can also be erased. You can make contacts with people you would otherwise never have met and people you will probably never get to meet. Groupings can occur across friends and acquaintances. We do not see the person we communicate with and can therefore break the social boundaries that would play a role in real life such as age, gender, social class, and occupation. Social media paves the way for many-to-many communications and breaks the distinction that broadcast media like books, newspapers, televisions and radios had between producers and consumers (Aalen 2012, 14) because in social media, everyone gets the opportunity to create and distribute something (Bruns 2007, 3). Social media allows people to transmit and share information to a broad audience and provides arenas for social interaction in ways that are brand new in media history.

Well-known social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, wikis, blogs, and many more which let users share their interests anytime and anywhere. Social media can also be called social networking services, online communities, and more often, social networking sites or social network sites. These are, as a rule, online communities where users have profiles with personal information that others can access. Danah m. boyd, professor on media, culture, and communication, and Nicole B. Ellison, professor in telecommunication and information studies, define social network sites (SNSs) as follows:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (boyd and Ellison 2007)

Social networking is an act of engagement. You can find groups of people with common interests, associate together on social networking sites, and build relationships through community. According to boyd and Ellison, social network sites have existed since 1997 when the first social network site, SixDegrees.com, was created. SixDegrees.com was the first service that combined two features together, allowing users to create profiles and list their friends. But the service was

unsuccessful as a business and was closed in 2000. The next movement of social network sites was the launching of Ryze.com in 2001, which helped people leverage their business networks (boyd and Ellison 2007). The figure below shows a timeline of the launch dates of many major social network sites and dates when community sites re-launched with social networking features.

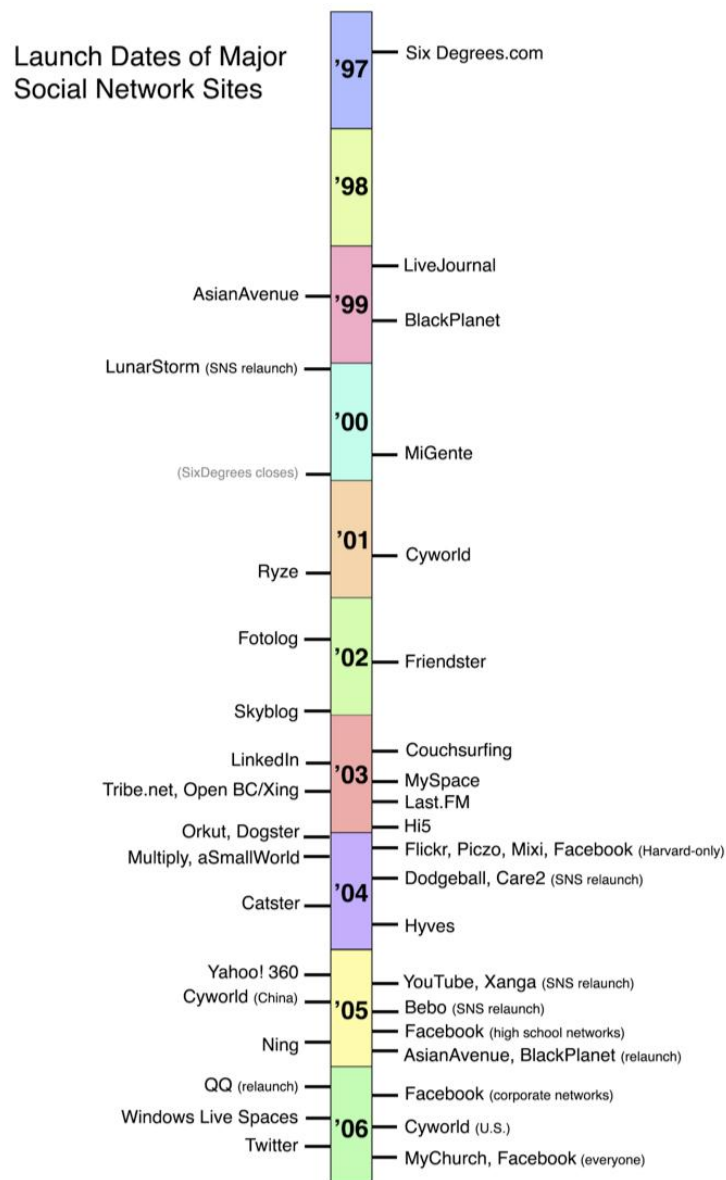


Figure 2: Launch dates of major social network sites. Retrieved from “Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship” by danah m. boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, 2007, p 212.

It is well known that people today spend lots of time using social network sites to access public life. Facebook is the largest social network site in the world (figure 3) and among the ten most popular and fastest growing social networking sites in the world (Smith 2013). Facebook was created by Mark Zuckerberg<sup>15</sup> on February 4, 2004, under the name “The Facebook” along with his partners Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes, and Eduardo Saverin. Zuckerberg was a student at Harvard University, and the website was intended as an internal network for university students. They wanted to create a tool that would make it easier for students to keep in touch with each other, and the website was limited to Harvard students only.

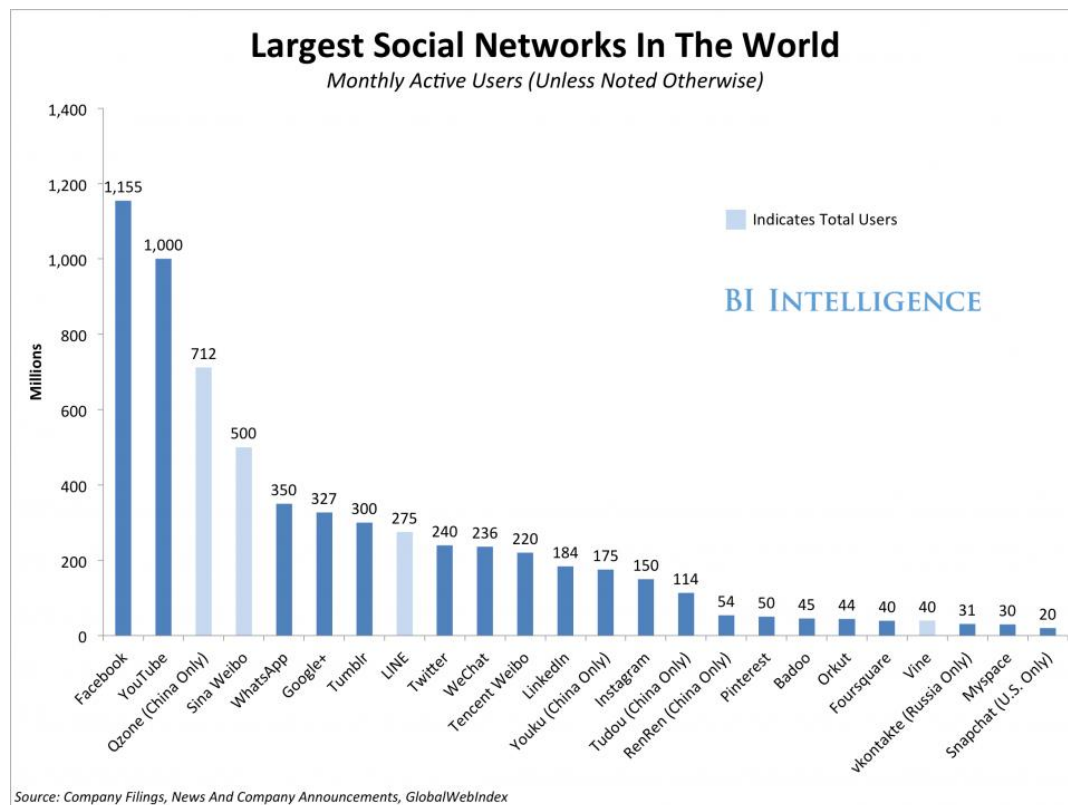


Figure 3: The planet’s 24 largest social media sites, and where their next wave of growth will come from (C. Smith 2013).

The invention of the Internet has been one of the most influential developments within information technologies. We are entering into a new age where social

<sup>15</sup> (Wikipedia, Mark Zuckerberg 2013)

networking has become the most important online activity in our society, and the use of social media has exploded in recent years. Social media can be important in different ways for different users. The most important characteristic of social media is that it has greatly impacted the way we communicate and especially enabled us to easily make connections between global organizations and citizens that can transcend borders. Social media has the power to create opportunities to change the landscape of interaction, and people get opportunities to break boundaries to create connections around the world.

Ananda Mitra, professor of communications, claims that human civilization has relied on small groups that gather together and take action. According to Mitra, it is important that people communicate with several other individuals in order to reach a specific goal. This type of communication leads to the formation of communities and networks of people who often develop long-standing relationships—for example, people that live in the diaspora (Mitra 2010, 12). This connection has given the opportunity to people that have been spread out worldwide to develop cyber communities. They will always be able to maintain connections and relationships by using social network sites.

### 3 Literature review and discussions

This chapter contains a broad presentation of the theoretical perspectives and emphasizes some opinions and important points from the literature about media and communication in diasporas and some previous research. The first part presents the beginning of media communication in the Kurdish diaspora in general and explains the use of old media communication in Kurdish history and the beginning of their struggle to raise their voices through old and new media communication. The next part is about the term “digital diaspora,” first used by Jenifer Brinkerhoff, the author of *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement*. I also highlight and discuss the question of virtuality on cyberspace and how the members of the diaspora develop virtual community and communication online with each other. The third part is about searching for identity in cyberspace and how Kurds in the diaspora have used the Internet to reconnect with their countrymen and to feel free to show their identity online.

#### 3.1 Previous research

As the first step in writing a study, the researcher should look for previous research in the field, and that was precisely what I did before starting with this study. After a prolonged search in the field, I found out that there has not been any research specifically on the Kurdish diaspora and social media, so the topic became more interesting but also challenging. But I found some interesting literature about diaspora and media and communications and some research about diaspora in general. Consequently, I tried to combine the research findings with the topic of my study.

There are several scientific studies about diaspora, identity, and new communication technology which did not specifically describe the Kurdish diaspora. One of the books I found relevant was Jennifer Brinkerhoff’s book (2009) *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement*. Brinkerhoff’s study is about how media and communication technologies are helping people in diasporas establish new identities with strong ties to each other and the community in their own homeland. She

describes this scene as an opportunity to leverage new media technologies to build communication networks and identity search. But she does not mention the Kurdish diaspora, and thus I was very interested to use her theories and determine whether my chosen interviewees describe the opportunity in the same way as Brinkerhoff describes about members of the diaspora in her book. Her study also describes how immigrants still feel a connection to home by using the Internet, and I linked this to Kurdish immigrants in the diaspora.

Another source was Alonso and Oiarzabal's (2010) *Diasporas in the New Media Age: Identity, Politics, and Community*. Their study is mainly based on the social use of technology among migrants and diaspora around the world, which can also include the Kurdish diaspora, although it is not mentioned in the book. Thus, I found the concepts and theories of these authors useful: does what they write about people in general in the diaspora apply to the Kurdish diaspora as well? I tried to compare the authors' opinions and explanations to the information I got from my informants.

For Kurdish identity in new media specifically, I used Jaffer Sheyholislami's study (2011) *Kurdish Identity Discourse, and New Media*. His study was a useful source on the identity expression of Kurds through old and new media. The beginning of Kurdish new media started with the broadcast of the first Kurdish satellite television MED-TV in 1994. This was as a huge opportunity for the Kurds to come out from the oppression they had been through and start expressing their ethnic identity through new communication technologies. Along with Sheyholislami's study, I have been used Amir Hassanpour's study "Diaspora, homeland and communication technologies." His topic is similar to mine, but he writes more about state building in the diaspora and MED-TV as Kurdish national television which was the uprising of Kurdish media in the Kurdish diaspora.

### 3.2 The beginning of media communication in the Kurdish diaspora

The relationship between technology and migration has long been an important process. Technological development and communication, as well as transportation infrastructure, have facilitated easier and stronger relations between migrants in the diaspora. For instance, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the communication system consisted of newspapers, radio, and television. These mediums made communication difficult for Kurdish immigrants to remain in contact with their homeland. Two decades ago, it would take many weeks and even months for news concerning major events in Kurdistan to reach most of the Kurds.

Kurds have suffered several tragedies and attacks by the neighboring enemies and have been victims of subjugation for most of their history. But news could not be transmitted immediately; it would take time for these incidents to reach other people within Kurdistan and other countries. One famous incident was the genocide campaign, called *Anfal*, in Iraqi Kurdistan which was carried out by Saddam Hussein's regime in 1988. Next to *Anfal* was the chemical attack of the town *Halabja* on March 16, 1988. Both incidents included abductions, chemical weapon use, identifications and executions, transfers, and internal displacements, during which about 100,000 people were killed and disappeared in *Anfal* and about 5000 people were gassed to death in *Halabja*. According to Bulloch and Morris<sup>16</sup>, the *Halabja* incident "did more than any other single incident in seventy years of rebellion against central authority to remind Kurds everywhere of their separate Kurdish identity". The news of both incidents did not even reach the Kurds who lived in Turkey, Iran, and Syria; it also caused very little reaction among Kurds in Iraq because it took them months and even years to realize the great loss and huge atrocities that had been done to the Kurdish people, particularly because they did not have the opportunity to communicate with each other. Sheyholislami states:

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<sup>16</sup> John Bulloch and and Morris Harvey, *No Friends but the Mountains: The Tragic History of the Kurds*, (USA: Oxford University Press, 1992.) 43, quoted in Jaffer Sheyholislami, *Kurdish Identity, Discourse, and New Media*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.



Kurds had no means to communicate with each other sufficiently; they lacked a collective identity even in Iraqi Kurdistan, let alone across the borders of four nation-states. (Sheyholislami 2011, 4)

The incident of *Halabja* was first discovered by an Iranian journalist right after the attack, and the first pictures after the attack were taken by Iranian photographer Kavah Golestan. The news was first spread in Iranian newspapers; a film of the atrocity was also shown worldwide via news programs (Kurdishgenocide 2013).

By “collective identity,” Sheyholislami means that it is important to communicate dialogically among the members of a prospective community.. As Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) claims, “to be means to communicate dialogically” (Bakhtin 1984, 252), but the Kurds could not be a part of this dialogically communication for almost a century as “their identities remained greatly fragmented” (Sheyholislami 2011, 4).

But in recent times, the diaspora has grown significantly; families, friends, and business partners who live on different continents are able to maintain contact with each other through modern communications technology and have developed the feeling of being in a global community (Oiarzabal and Alonso 2010, 9). The technological advancement has been advantageous for immigrants, and “there has been a close correlation between technology and migration” (Oiarzabal and Alonso 2010, 7). In the 1990s and 2000s, national media and communication systems such as radio, newspaper, and television have profoundly changed the way national identities are created and reproduced (ibid.). Kurdish cross-border identity has also begun to emerge since the mid-1990s, partly because of political developments, but most importantly because of the increasing and effective use of digital broadcasting satellites among the Kurds (Sheyholislami 2011, 4). As Georgiou Myria, researcher of media and communication cultures, states:

Diasporas are transnational communities, which extensively depend on media and communication technologies for sustaining relations and connections across distance and across diverse subgroups. (Georgiou 2007, 17)

The connection between media and diaspora is of huge importance to the diaspora communities because it provides them various opportunities to easily gain access to images and sounds and to expand opportunities for two-way or multiple-way communication between various locations, groups, and individuals (ibid.). We have been through an enormous transition from old media to new media. We can connect more easily and stay updated about everything around. We have been given the opportunity to listen and be listened to by others. This case could be very important to the Kurds because they have the potential to raise their voice and speak out more loudly and openly than before. They can become more visible to the whole world and other Kurds worldwide. According to Yochayi Benkler, the rise of network technologies is associated with self-perception of individuals, and “easy possibility of communicating effectively into the public sphere allows individuals to reorient themselves from passive readers and listeners into potential speakers and active participants in a conversation” (Benkler 2006, 213).

The Kurdish people are now able to join in many activities online without being physically present in the same place at the same time, even though they live thousands of miles from each other. Information technology has been very helpful for the Kurds to tighten the bond with fellow Kurds back home in Kurdistan and in other places in the world. By the 1970s, transistor radios and other early electronic media were already an important medium for political activity and cultural communication for migrants in the homeland and in Europe. But with the revolution of information technologies in 1990s, media became central in Kurdish migrants’ lives, with access to media such as Internet, mobile phone, and fax. It is also important to mention the first Kurdish satellite television channel (MED-TV),<sup>17</sup> launched in 1995 and broadcast in London by the Independent Television Commission (ITC). MED-TV’s office was in London, but most of the production was in Brussels and Stockholm. The channel was broadcast daily and contained various programs, including newscasts in two languages, Kurdish and Turkish. Through the channel, many Kurdish political leaders from all parts of Kurdistan managed to participate in debates, and viewers of MED-

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<sup>17</sup> MED-TV was as a London-based international Kurdish satellite television station, licensed by Britain regulators from 1994–1999. It was later replaced by MEDYA TV in Belgium, and then by Roj TV in 2004 in Denmark (Wikipedia, Roj TV 2013).

TV from Kurdistan and the diaspora participated in live talk shows and debates through the telephone (Hassanpour 2003, 81). This could be perceived as one of the first direct communications between Kurds in the diaspora; they managed to find and talk to each other through the channel and had the opportunity to raise their voices and share views and thoughts. According to Amir Hassanpour, this inter- or pan-Kurdish dialogue had never before occurred in the media (ibid.).

MED-TV was viewed by the Kurds themselves as a catalyst (Sheyholislami 2011, 5). Almost every program, including entertainment, cultural, music, and children's programming, was broadcast in Kurdish. They even had a Kurdish language-teaching program, although no language other than Turkish was supposed to be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education (Hassanpour 2003, 81).

While Kurds have individually resisted the ban of education by secretly teaching themselves and their children to read and write in their language, MED-TV provided such instruction to millions of viewers on a daily basis. For example, the program *Roj Baş Mamosta* (Hello, Teacher!) consisted of a classroom setting where a teacher instructed children in their native tongue, using a blackboard, books and other teaching materials. (Hassanpour 2003, 82)

Despite the laws in Turkey that ban the Kurdish language, using Kurdish names, and identifying with retrogressive tribal groups, MED-TV managed to give courage to the Kurdish people by, among many other things, beginning daily broadcasts with a grand orchestra performing the Kurdish national anthem, *Ey Reqîb* (O Enemy). Not only that, they also showed the Kurdish national flag daily, and even the MED-TV logo consisted of the four colors of the Kurdish national flag: red, green, white, and yellow. Every Kurd could agree with Hassanpour's powerful statement:

*"MED-TV treated the Kurds not as audiences but as citizens of a Kurdish state."*  
(ibid.)

MED-TV became the Kurdish national television channel of the immigrant Kurds. This satellite channel had great impact on Kurds worldwide, and according to

Hassanpour (1998), “MED-TV has become a national television station for the Kurds – the largest nation in the world today without a recognized homeland.” Hassanpour cites one Kurdish newspaper that called the channel “a media revolution ... more important than all our armed revolutions and a great historical leap” (ibid.). Hassanpour states that MED-TV threatened the Turkish state’s single coherent sovereign presence in politically and culturally significant ways (Hassanpour 2003, 85).

MED-TV is seen as the first step that Kurds have taken into the virtual community. It also gave Kurds the ability to communicate with the world outside Kurdistan and created a new pathway for new information and communication technologies. According to Ryan (as cited in Sheyholislami 2011, 5) the Kurds all over the world were very excited about MED-TV, and they thought it was the first step on the last, long part of the road to formation of a Kurdish state.

Unfortunately, the Turkish government could not allow MED-TV to run and tried all possibly ways to convince ITC to close down the channel, despite all the support and the huge number of viewers. MED-TV encountered violence, was accused by Turkey of being related to the political organization PKK, and was called “terrorism” and “hate propaganda.” A MED-TV director received threatening letters. Another was physically attacked in Germany. Finally, the broadcast was jammed on December 14, 1995 (Hassanpour 2003, 83). The channel started to broadcast later but had issues again on September 18, 1996; this happened several times until 1999. On March 6, 1999, Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit commanded his European and NATO counterparts to close down MED-TV and a Kurdish newspaper published in Europe (Hassanpour 2003, 85) and managed to revoke MED-TV on April 23, 1999. Despite the difficulties MED-TV experienced in the 1990s, there are today many Kurdish satellite television channels.

### 3.3 Digital diaspora

The first time I read about the term “digital diaspora” was in Jennifer Brinkerhoff’s book, *Digital Diasporas Identity and Transnational Engagement* (2009). Brinkerhoff developed an analytic framework that identifies several aspects of digital diaspora activities, highlighting their importance to global and national arenas. I found her term and the aspects in the book to provide a good approach to Kurdish virtual communities and their use of Internet tools. Internet communications enable dispersed populations to create cyber communities to provide solidarity among members (Brinkerhoff 2009, 14).

Members use discussion forums to disseminate information about the homeland faith and/or culture; to reinforce or recreate identity to make it more relevant and sustainable across generations in diaspora; and to connect to and participate in homeland relationships, festivals, and socio-economic development. (ibid.)

Digital diaspora or virtual communities are new phenomena and have been used recently with the advent of Internet technologies and communication technologies. According to Brinkerhoff, those who lived in the diaspora participated in physical diaspora communities before the development of new communication technologies, but now they can create their online communities with their fellow countrymen in different countries in different ways, or “they may simply use the Internet to pursue purposive objectives related to their homeland identity” (Brinkerhoff 2009, 12). Therefore, the Internet has numerous unique and advantageous features that can help diasporic communities feel a sense of cultural belonging. The Internet has become a tool for communication for the dispersed populations and is ideally suited for connecting people in the diaspora who are geographically scattered and removed from their homeland. The Internet is also a tool for community building among the people in the diaspora (ibid.).

The Kurdish diaspora is one of those communities that have also taken full advantage of new communication technologies to revive their threatened culture and language. Kurdish participants have widely integrated the Internet into their lives in last decade,

actively adapting the technology and participating in social practices. Cyberspace, or the Internet, has been like a home for the Kurdish people who live far from their homelands. This opportunity leads to stronger identities with and among diaspora communities and also stronger connections with their homelands.

### **3.4 Identity search in cyberspace**

With the development of new communication technologies and World Wide Web, their impact started to affect social life and communities, and this emergence has become evident everywhere. Different communities and people everywhere have started using the Internet and showing their identities in cyberspace. The term “cyberspace” was first introduced in William Gibson’s book *Neuromancer* in 1984.<sup>18</sup> He described it as the “graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system” (Gibson 1984, 51). He defined cyberspace as a world of interconnected computer systems. Today cyberspace is understood as the physical network of an imaginary world, something that can be illustrated by sending and downloading files on the network (the physical network) and people meeting online (the imaginary world). Gibson's cyberspace consists of computer-based information and forms a virtual world that moves in line with the real world. The use of cyberspace has become an important part of life for many people, especially dispersed people who are living far away from their original territories and their homelands, including Kurds in the diaspora. The possibility that the World Wide Web gives for people to come in contact with each other is huge. Its own cultures based on different forms of text provided the opportunity for the development of virtual communities, particularly news sharing and online communication. Howard Rheingold describes virtual communities as follows:

People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. People in virtual communities do just about everything people

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<sup>18</sup> (Gibson, *Neuromancer* 1984)

do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind. You can't kiss anybody and nobody can punch you in the nose, but a lot can happen within those boundaries. To the millions who have been drawn into it, the richness and vitality of computer-linked cultures is attractive, even addictive. (Rheingold 1993, 3)

Cyberspace has been a virtual place where many dispersed communities across the world can connect and is considered an online home. Cyberspace is “the communal space digitally created by the interconnection of millions of computerized machines and people” (Oiarzabal and Alonso 2010, 2). Cyberspace has given immigrants the opportunity to reconnect with their fellow natives around the world, and “it is a new space of hopes, desires, dreams, frustrations and beginnings” (ibid.).

When members of the diaspora connect with each other in cyberspace, they share a self-awareness or “diasporic” consciousness. According to Brinkerhoff, “they identify with each other as members of a dispersed identity group with continuing common ties to the homeland” (Brinkerhoff 2009, 30). This expands the self-perception of diaspora members and their positioning in relation to group phenomena such as social, cultural, or ethnic identity. They can improve their own culture, profess and practice their own language, and discuss some of the complex historical and social dynamics with other members in the diaspora. Brinkerhoff claims that identity is at the very core of diaspora and its influence in home- and hostland; it converts members in diaspora from the physical reality of dispersal into the psychosocial reality of diaspora (Brinkerhoff 2009, 32; Butler 2001, 207). The sense of “belonging” and the problems of “homelessness” are no longer as before, and through online services, dispersed communities seek and find their homes in virtual spaces and get some sort of confirmation and acknowledgment about their belongingness (Elias and Lemish 2009, 549). Accordingly, the impressive developments of the Internet have been very important for the Kurds.

The great increase in the number of Kurdish web sites and then weblogs started in the 2000s when Kurdistan started to be served by relatively self-sufficient ISP (Internet service providers) and services and with the development of the first Unicode-based Kurdish font (Sheyholislami 2011, 90). Kurdish Unicode was developed by

Kurditgroup,<sup>19</sup> a Kurdish technical group, in the beginning of 2000. They created a Windows Kurdish support program, a standard digital Kurdish alphabet which made writing Kurdish on computers and publishing on the Internet much easier (Sheyholislami 2011, 90). This standard by Kurditgroup was soon adapted by the community. Piet Bakker (2001) was the first to present a study on the Internet in connection to the Kurds. He showed a search on a website with the word “Kurdistan,” which returned 1,800 items in June 2001. Sheyholislami conducted the same search in May 2007 with the result of 658,500 hits (Sheyholislami 2011, 90). Today, Google finds over four million hits. What Sheyholislami tries to explain here is that the presence of the term “Kurdistan” on Internet has seen a dramatic growth since 2001 (ibid.), and many Kurdish websites exist on the Internet.

After this development, the number of Kurdish websites and various cyberspaces or “online” platforms increased. For example, there are a number of Kurdish websites, online publications, Web catalogues, and social media, along with “on-air” television and radio arrangements. According to Khalid Khayati, Kurdish political scientist and researcher on the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden and France, these have given Kurds the opportunity to build new spaces of communication that challenge the existing of geographical, cultural, and political constraints in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and in the diaspora (Khayati n.d.). The Kurdish people in general and the Kurdish diaspora have strengthened their online presence in the last ten years by being in contact with each other, participating in political and cultural activities, and through numerous websites such as *Kurdish News*, *Kurdistan Press*, *Zkurd*, *Kurdistan Post*, *Kurdistan Net*, *Kurdish Globe*, *WeKurd*, *Kurdistan Observer*, *Kurdish info*, *Kurdish Media*, etc. Khayati claims that the abundant number of websites gives evidence of how the Kurds in general and Kurds in the diaspora in particular confirm their online presence (ibid.).

In particular, non-state ethnic groups are using Internet and social network sites to empower their status and gain the dignity and pride they lacked when they were oppressed in their homelands. The sense of belonging that the Kurds have built up can be seen in the context of Benedict Anderson’s theory of “the imagined community”

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<sup>19</sup> Kurditgroup, “Speekulate” (Ghafour 2011)



(Anderson 1992, 224) and his best-known book on nationalism, *Imagined Communities*. According to Anderson, a group of people can feel solidarity and affiliation despite the fact that they are spread over large distances and that they may not even have met each other in reality. For the Kurds, knowing that they all exist even at opposite ends of the earth is enough to feel a sense of belonging to each other. The increase in usage of Internet tools among Kurds in the diaspora helps them to rebuild their national identity and awareness of nationhood, what Anderson has called *long-distance nationalism* (1992). It arises to a large extent from the initiative of many devoted and competent individuals who live in different Western societies. It allows disparate groups to “imagine themselves as nations” and provides a voice to those who otherwise would not have one (Sheyholislami 2011, 179). In other words, the Internet has diminished the importance of time and space by offering the Kurds a cyberspace wherein they can express their identity and reinforce Kurdish nationalism.

Language is of the most important components of national identity. It is not only one of the most significant indices of collective identity but also one of the prime means of constructing and reproducing that identity (Sheyholislami 2010, 290). Language is perhaps the most visible part of an individual’s identity because we use it every day and it is the first impression we give in meeting with other people. One could say that language defines the identity and the identity defines the language. For the Kurdish people as well, language has been considered as one of the main indices of Kurdish identity (Sheyholislami 2011, 58). Turkey’s attempted suppression of the Kurdish language has highlighted this.

The Internet revolution made it possible to communicate in writing in completely new ways, and written communication can now take place in real time, such as through social media platforms. This has helped to ensure that not only the movement of information but also the amount of information that can be shared has increased dramatically. Therefore, it is almost impossible “to understand national identities adequately without investigating how communication technologies serve as catalysts for their (re)construction” (Sheyholislami 2010, 290).

The Kurdish people have been struggling with speaking their own language for many years, and they still do in some areas of Kurdistan. It was denied or suppressed by the

Turkish in northern Kurdistan, by Arabs in southern, western, and eastern Kurdistan, and by Persian nationalist ideologies in Iran. Nevertheless, today the language is used on thousands of websites, social networking sites, and weblogs. The Kurdish language has been expanded by communication technologies which allow members of the diaspora and the Kurdish people in Kurdistan to share and exchange meanings, “signs and discursive constructions of collective identities” (ibid.). Kurds have never been so free to use their own language as they are today, especially through communication platforms. As political scientist David Romano states:

Crucial tasks, including the standardization and propagation of the Kurdish language, the codification of a Kurdish history and culture, and the challenging of state discourses that deny or suppress Kurdish identity are now pursued through the use of technologies such as satellite broadcasting, Internet and desktop publishing. (Romano 2002, 148)

The language is simply used to create greater unity between the Kurds so they can think as one people. It has been seen as the strongest tie that connects the Kurds directly with their history, culture, and especially identity. Facebook groups, as an example, have played a big role for the Kurds because they are able to create different forums about different topics to express themselves and stimulate debate in the Kurdish language so they can understand each other better. This also allows them to keep each other informed about issues and topics which they find important.

## 4 Research methodology

The main purpose of this study is to understand how Kurdish ethnic identities in the diaspora are expressed through social network sites such as Facebook. Gathering empirical data was an important part of the research due to the fact that there is little previous research on how Kurds in the diaspora use social media.

This chapter introduces the research methodology, data collection, and development of theory and analysis used in this study. The first part of this chapter presents general qualitative research methodology. The second part is about the specific qualitative research methodology that I have used, in the form of an open interview with the participants chosen for this study; in addition, I describe how I followed the general research strategies that were mentioned earlier. The following part of this chapter is about the interviews, how I found participants, the reason they were chosen, and the thoughts behind the questions chosen for the interview. The last part is about my reflexivity in the research and my role as a Kurd and as a researcher.

### 4.1 Qualitative research methodology

There are two type of research methodology: *quantitative* and *qualitative*. Quantitative methods are research methods concerned with numbers and what is measurable (quantifiable). Counting and measuring are among the most common forms of such methods. The basic concepts that characterize qualitative research methodologies, according to Barrie Gunter, are “relevant modes of measurement and procedures to analyse the relationship between such measurements” (Gunter 2012, 238). Quantitative research is generally used in studies in which research questions are usually defined by specific variables and standardized methods of data collection are used. The variables can then be expressed in numerical values, and this data can then be described and analyzed using statistical methods. Thus, this type of research methodology is not relevant for this study. I have chosen a qualitative research method because I concentrate mostly on stories and experiences of individuals, namely Kurds in the diaspora. I want to know about the individuals, not the numbers,

and a qualitative approach gives a better understanding of the phenomenon and a more detailed and comprehension of the subject. Qualitative research has been used in many studies and is characterized as “words rather than numbers” (Bryman 2004, 266). This means that we can discover stories and the individuals who are involved behind the words. Jensen describes qualitative communication studies in three common denominators:

(1) Studies focus on meaning, both as an object of study and as explanatory concept of study and as explanatory concept. (2) Qualitative research normally assumes that communication should be examined as far as possible, in its naturalistic contexts. (3) Third common feature in qualitative studies is the conception of researchers as interpretive subjects. (Jensen 2012, 266)

The combination of these three common features of qualitative research “suggest how qualitative studies perform their analytical procedures and how these lead into theory development” (ibid.). Thus, qualitative research methods help to focus on specific areas, and it is important to limit the area of research to reveal details and patterns, namely by hearing some people’s history and what they experience as users of social media in the Kurdish diaspora and linking the stories together with theoretical concepts. The research can thus enable a better and deeper understanding of the problem if I optimize a small research focus, not expanding the periphery and losing the basics of the subject. My purpose is therefore to collect data that makes it possible to understand and answer the problem. With qualitative methods I can determine the type of data I want to collect, which questions I want to ask my informants, and how can I get the data, i.e., where I can get hold of my informants. This method will then give a good representation of research topic and construct an accurate representation of the problem. The formulation of the problem will affect which methods should be used, and qualitative methods help to collect empirical materials.

Helge Østbye et al. describe two important considerations for the collection of empirical material. The first is how to ensure relevant insights, and the second is how to proceed in order to ensure that ethical principles are safeguarded for the people I interview (Østbye et al. 2002, 98). An important methodological question is to delineate what relevant data are to be collected, how, and why. It is important to

specify what to ask informants to underpin the main question, how can I find informants, and why the chosen informants are the best for my study. This type of data collection is also presented by Klaus Bruhn Jensen in his book *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research* (2012). Jensen argues that qualitative studies can be described further with reference to two or more stages of sampling that they often involve: the first step is to “[identify] a relevant context of communication” and the next step is to “single out certainties of its media, users and communicative interactions for detailed study” (Jensen 2012, 268).

## 4.2 Qualitative research interviews

As previously mentioned, the method chosen for this study is a qualitative research open interview. By interviewing people, I had to converse with the participants because conversation was the most important tool I had to work with when I wanted to gather knowledge and important information. I considered it an opportunity and a challenge to focus on each participant’s story regarding the topic of this study. I followed Bryman’s advice of “words rather numbers” (Bryman 2004, 266), and therefore I concentrated on what participants had to tell, tried to understand them, and paid attention to their words. Besides being the author of this study, it was an advantage being a Kurd because I had some knowledge of Kurdish history. I knew that Kurds have been exposed to enormous pain and difficulty throughout history, and they have also experienced a huge technology development in a very short period of time. But I wanted to gather more information about what and how new technology developments have affected the people, which I believed could give me knowledge and perhaps answers to most of the questions related to this study. By interviewing the participants with the questions I created for the purpose of this study, I was able to “get information that would otherwise be difficult to access,” as Østbye et al. have represented in their discussion of the advantages of qualitative interviews (Østbye et al. 2002, 100).

The purpose of using a qualitative research interview was to learn about the participants’ experience about their use of Facebook as Kurds so they could share some stories related to expressing their ethnical identity through Facebook. I have

followed the three common recommendations that Gunter (2012) suggested for theory development (see chapter 3.1). Three main key concepts were in the focus when I worked with this study: Kurds in the diaspora, social media, and ethnic identity. These were highlighted throughout this study, and the interviews focused on these three subjects. The second recommendation I followed was to establish the context of the communication I performed with my participants, which leads to the third recommendation about interpretive subjects. The interview's aim was to describe and understand the key aspects of the situation the participants are in; my aim was to understand the content and meaning of what they said through the interview. I interpreted not only what was said but the way it was said and also noted vocal and physical expressions. I aimed to bring out the nuanced descriptions of the participants' situations to get a better interpretation of the subject.

The purpose of this study was to collect data to get a better understanding of my informants' use of and experience of social media, and to ensure the reader that the study attempted to present the best possible information and data about the topic. Since the explored topics in my research were defined in advance, the interview was conducted as semi-structured interview (Østbye et al. 2002, 102). Semi-structured interviews can be carried out in the form of an interview guide with categorized and open questions to which it is possible to ask follow-up questions (ibid.). The chosen questions for this study are as follows:

1. Why do you use Facebook?
2. How often do you use Facebook?
3. What meaning does joining Facebook give you as a Kurd?
4. Are you in contact with more Kurds than non-Kurds on Facebook? If so, why?
5. What do you discuss with other Kurds on Facebook? Why is this important to you?
6. Do you feel fellowship with other Kurds you talk to? Why or why not?
7. Have you experienced problems through Facebook because of your ethnic identity? If yes, what kind of problems?
8. Do you participate in political discussions on Facebook? What is spoken about in political discussions on Facebook?

9. Do you feel associated to other Kurds who you are in contact with on Facebook?  
Why or why not?
10. Do you have a sense of belonging when you are in contact with other Kurds on Facebook? Can you describe the feeling, or an experience?
11. How do you convey your Kurdish identity through Facebook? (Images, cultural production, political symbols, etc.). Does this lead to a community between you and other Kurds?
12. What do you think is most important to convey about your identity as a Kurd?
13. What more would you say about the importance of Facebook?

According to Østbye et al., questions or topics to be highlighted should be motivated by the general research question and should be relevant to it. This means we should be familiar with the area we are asking about, and we should also have clear ideas about what questions will illustrate the study's research question (Østbye et al. 2006, 101). Based on Østbye et al.'s advice, I highlighted the questions with the research question on how the Kurds in the diaspora express a common ethnic identity through social media. I was familiar with some parts of the research question—that there is a Kurdish diaspora, that they use social media and that it was difficult to express a common ethnic identity earlier. Now I wanted to find out how Facebook has been used as a tool for communication and conveying ethnic identity to other Kurds and people in the whole world.

The interview questions were based on three main concepts: Kurds in the diaspora, social media (Facebook), and ethnic identity. Before I started with the questions related to the three concepts, I had to know if my participants were using Facebook at all and how often they used it because it would not make any sense if they were not using Facebook. So they were questioned about their use of Facebook in general. The next step was to find out whether they were in contact with more Kurds than non-Kurds because it was important to know if what Kurds express through Facebook is only seen by other Kurds or also by non-Kurds. The fourth question is about the type of discussion and which topics are more important to talk about between Kurds. I created this question to have some further idea about topics I could further explore, and I did in fact learn of new topics. Many of the participants also mentioned political

issues in questions five and eight, when I directly asked if the participants had political discussions on Facebook.

I was very interested to know whether the participants felt closely associated with each other and whether they felt fellowship with their countrymen in the homeland and in the diaspora, because as a Kurd I knew the feeling of living far from my homeland and my people. I wanted to know if Facebook made any difference from the feeling people had before, when they could not be connected with the homeland as easily as today. Those thoughts led me to questions six and nine but also question ten in a different way. The sense of belonging through Facebook might sound a little strange for many people because it is only a social media site where people talk and share, but it could be something more for Kurds, a vulnerable population with a strong ethnic identity which has been taken from them.

As part of the Kurdish community in diaspora, I have followed all news and stories concerning the Kurds, especially through Facebook. In the beginning of 2012, Kurds had some issues with Facebook because of showing and conveying their identity through pictures and being political active. Many of my friends had issues like deactivated Facebook accounts and removed sharing from their timeline. So I created a question (question seven) to find out whether my participants had had the same issue or whether they had some opinions about the issue that they wanted to talk about in the interview.

Questions eleven and twelve were important to ask because I wanted to find out what participants liked to share to convey their ethnical identity and what they saw as most important. After all, one of Facebook's most important features is sharing.

The questions in the interview were open so that the interviewees were encouraged to wander and move outside the frames of questions and to feel free to answer the question with answers that could be more flexible and open during the process. But I also wanted to give them this opportunity more directly, so I made the last question more open to let them feel free to talk about something other than what we talked about earlier. I wanted to find out whether my participants had something new and different to talk about that I had not thought of.



The thirteen questions and the answers from eight participants are included as an appendix to this study (see appendix). I gathered the important data from the interviews and categorized them into chapters based on the important points of the conversation with participants. They are analyzed and presented in chapter 5, and some of the relevant quotes from participants are discussed. According to Østbye et al., “relevant observations are continuously being made to data” (Østbye et al. 2006, 107). By relevant quotes, I mean the opinions which can be included in the framework for the study’s three important key concepts: the Kurdish diaspora, Kurdish ethnic identity, and social media. Every conversation related to the key concepts has been observed and interpreted.

## **4.3 Interviewees**

The first step of this study was to find previous research relevant to my study. In my research, I want to examine deeply and dig beneath the surface of the phenomenon. Then I started to seek and gather participants to question about the purpose and the importance of their use of Facebook. There were eight interviewees in this study, three men and five women between the ages of 20 and 30 with different educational and professional backgrounds. They also represent different parts and areas of Kurdistan. All of the chosen interviewees were Kurds with a Kurdish ethnic background living in Norway.

Most of the participants were selected through online communication forums like Facebook groups where only Kurds are members, and a few of them were selected through personal contacts. I went through some of the Kurdish groups on Facebook, such as Kurdistan Student Union, Kurdere i Norge (Kurds in Norway), KSFN (Kurdisk Student forening i Norge), and KKFH (Kurdisk Kulturforum i Hordeland). The post I published on Facebook was written in Norwegian and consisted of brief information about my topic and that I needed informants to be a part of a semi-structured interview. At that time my questions of the interview were not completely ready, and therefore I did not post the questions. But I did write that my research question was about Kurds in the diaspora and their expression of common ethnic

identity through social media and Facebook specifically. Seven people answered the post at this time and wanted to be interviewed, but only five of them actually participated. The two others contacted me later and said that they could not be interviewed because of personal issues. The other three of the eight interviewees were suggested by a friend of mine.

Some of the interviewees were in another city of Norway, which made it difficult to meet with them and do the interview in person; therefore, they were interviewed through email exchanging and through Skype. The rest of the interviews were done in person, and the interview audio was recorded. The conversations with the interviewees were performed in Kurdish and Norwegian. I explained about the topic and the purpose of the study in Kurdish with some basic information, but the interview questions were asked and answered in Norwegian. When I first contacted the participants and told them about the interview, I asked which language they preferred for the interview questions, and they all wanted to be interviewed in Norwegian, so I made two versions of the questions, one in Norwegian and one in English. I did not write the questions in Kurdish because I knew that some concepts and words would have another meaning when translated due to the differences between the Kurdish and Norwegian/English languages.

Before I started the study, I had to report the project to NSD (Norwegian Social Science Data Services) and follow their procedures about privacy because it is required to report projects which contain privacy data. The requirements I sent to NSD were agreed to and the project was approved.

I was also required to consider some ethical questions during the process of data collection, analysis, and presentation. This was required to ensure the privacy and safety of the interviewees so that they felt secure and protected with their own privacy. In the first meeting with the interviewees, I informed them about confidentiality before the interviews were conducted and made it clear that their concerns were very much taken into account. I explained all necessary information about myself as a researcher, what I am studying, and which university I attend. After the basic information, I explained the purpose of the study, why I chose to write about the topic, and what I am going to do with the results. Interviewees were also informed

that they had the opportunity to withdraw from participating in the interviews if they were not satisfied with the given information and the details of the research.

To protect their privacy, the interviewees in this study are anonymized and represented with invented names, without any address or other personal information, which they were informed about. The interviewees are between 20 and 30 years old. Only important details related to the topic of this study are presented, such as their gender and which part of Kurdistan they come from. Following is a list of the eight interviewees:

*Rahel*: From Silemani, southern Kurdistan (male).

*Hana*: From Hewler, southern Kurdistan (female).

*Serkar*: From Elbistan, northern Kurdistan (male).

*Valan*: From Duhok, southern Kurdistan (female).

*Sazan*: From Silemani, southern Kurdistan (female).

*Hezan*: From Konya, northern Kurdistan (male).

*Rojin*: From Duhok, southern Kurdistan (female).

*Bina*: From Silemani, southern Kurdistan (female).

## **4.4 Reflexivity in the research process**

It is important to document reflexivity in qualitative research, which means that the researcher must take a critical look at their own ideas, role, use of methods, meeting with informants, interpretation, etc. Reflexivity is about social knowledge context, how this can determine what we are studying, the ways we are researching, and how we understand our research. Reflexivity can be constructed in different ways, and these structures should be evaluated in a responsive manner in relation to the main topic. When a researcher reflects upon the work in a study, it is important to think about the way she/he is going to do the work, and the way she/he has conducted the research process.

With my unique insight and knowledge of what I study, it was very demanding to be reflexive about my own role. With my role as a Kurd and researcher, I was trying to

reflect on my research in several ways throughout the research process, before and during the shaping of my study, and during the implementation process, the analysis, and the qualitative process. I had to see the meaning of my own role as a Kurd in the interaction with the methods I was going to use with my informants, the empirical data that I was going to find, and the theoretical perspective.

The appeal of the reflexivity theory lies in the ability to create new knowledge and different techniques. I needed to find out what knowledge I had and what knowledge I needed to produce. I wrote down some of the knowledge I had about the field and what I did not know but wanted to gather more information about. The knowledge I had before was mostly about the Kurds as a population without their own nation divided up among four main countries but also spread to other countries in the world, which is called the diaspora. I also knew that many Kurds had lately been using Facebook in different ways than other people. I discovered that because as a Kurd I am part of the Kurdish community, and had most likely acquired more knowledge than expected, without being aware of and without having noticed it myself, I had gathered some information easily though the Internet. But what I did not know was how Facebook could be used as an important tool for expressing ethnical identity and how features of Facebook have become such important tools for Kurds in the diaspora. I was interested in going deeper in the subject, exploring more, and finding some of the answers to my questions. So I created an outline of what might be relevant to my research question and what would be less relevant.

But it was important to outline how to use the knowledge in this study as well what to produce. Christina Hughes, professor of gender and education and researcher of research methodologies, argues that producing knowledge is related to the question of objectivity and subjectivity, social reality, and identity (Hughes 2002). It is therefore very important to observe it in my research field because I had to take an *observer role* (Østbye et al. 2006, 109), and in my study I had to find more than one role: a researcher role and a social role, as Østbye et al. describes, in this case a role as a Kurd.

Researching or Creating Identities: This section is sub-titled the postmodern impetus. This is because researchers are now concerned with (a) the

relationship between research and fiction through the characterisation and narrative structures used in the written account; and (b) the production of the researcher's identity. (Hughes 2002)

Thus, I distinguished between the two roles because the researcher role defined me greatly in terms of the roles that are possible, relevant, and justifiable to go into, but as a researcher I did not have an equal control over my social role as a Kurd because it was of course influenced by my role as researcher (Østbye et al. 2006, 110). This means that I was affected by the research work as a researcher as well as a Kurd, and that I reflected on what I am researching on the field and linked it to my own identity and behavior. Thus, I identified myself with my research and presented my own personal and professional role as bearing on the subject. It was required for me to be an observer of my work because of the circumstances, actions, habits, and the frame I was in. Sometimes I could understand my informants because of our shared ethnic identity and background but took things for granted. But as a researcher I was required to observe every little detail of what my participants talked about because my social and personal background could affect my perception of what I was observing, and the loss of a little detail could leave a huge gap in the study and make readers wonder. One of Mezirow's seven different levels of reflection, as Christina Hughes (2012) refers to, is about "awareness of specific perception, meaning, behavior." These three concepts were the most important aspects that I considered and used as a researcher. I reflected on my personal opinion, behavior, and specific opinion on how Kurds create a common identity through social media, but with some limitations. As a researcher I reflected on how my own experience and subjectivity in some cases affected many parts of the research process.

My role in this research as a Kurd was very challenging and had to be limited to a large extent. In some situations I had to bring out my own ethnic identity and background, such as when I interviewed my informants, since I speak the same language as them and most likely had a better understanding of the overall interpretation of their stories. But my own reflection was also inconvenient in some cases. I tried thus to be critical of my own ideas, methods, and role, and when I met my informants, I tried to ignore some things that were important for me personally to talk about but were not relevant to the topic in this study. At the same time I had a

great overview of some things that I would normally take for granted but are actually quite important to mention. As a Kurd, I had some basic knowledge and information about the historical background and some theoretical perspective, but I needed to gather more information by reading previous research and other books which related to my topic.

## **4.5 Chapter conclusion**

The methodology approach in this study was one of the most time consuming parts but also one of the most important parts. I had to overcome many obstacles in the process, revise some of the obstacles, and think about things I would make different. The research methodology chapter was presented to give an overview of how I planned to work, which methods I used, and how I worked through the study. The main point of this chapter was to give readers a solid understanding of the type of research methodology that I used.

The open interview gathered a lot of important data and was helpful to the research theory. Even though I gathered many relevant data by interviewing eight participants, I believe that more participants could have provided more data and probably new knowledge to this study. At the beginning of the study planning, I hoped to find fifteen interviewees, but I ended up with eight due to the difficulty in finding participants. I believe that fifteen participants could have been more effective for my study than eight.

As a Kurd and a researcher, I found that reflecting about my own role was very challenging. I had to use some of my previous knowledge about the field but also produce a lot more knowledge that I did not have before. As a Kurd I reflected on my personal beliefs with some limitations, and as a researcher I reflected on my experience and subjectivity.

There are some things I would like to have done differently in, or rather have added to, the research process. At the end of the research process, I came up with an idea about interviewing some non-Kurds, namely some Norwegians, to compare the

results. Unfortunately, I did not have time to go through a new round of interviews, but I believe that the use of Facebook by Norwegian people is hugely different from the Kurds in Norway who are far from their homeland. This could affect the results in many ways, for example, expressing and conveying identity through Facebook. Facebook is just a social media site to make connections with people and share interesting posts and pictures, which is what a Norwegian would think. But additional features of Facebook appear through the interview with Kurds in the diaspora.

## **5 Research results and discussion**

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of the empirical findings, which includes the answers from the interviewees. Only the most relevant and important viewpoints of the interviewees are highlighted and discussed in accordance with the main topic about use of social network sites in the diaspora. After gathering all the completed data from the research interview, the answers of each participant were obtained and tabulated. The main questions and the answers are divided and categorized into sections according to which topics they were most appropriate for.

The first section in this chapter is about the importance of Facebook for Kurds in the diaspora, which presents some of the important points of the interviewees about their use of Facebook. As I was interviewing my participants, I discovered that many of them are very politically active on Facebook and use it mostly to discuss political issues in Kurdistan. Therefore, the next section is about political platforms on Facebook. Facebook, as for Kurds in the diaspora, can be used in many different ways—for example as an arena for fellowship and association with other Kurds—so the next section presents participants' feelings about their contact with other Kurds.

Kurds have been through many problematic incidents because of their ethnic identity and nationality, even on Facebook. The next section presents some of the issues with censorship and controversy on Facebook, with viewpoints of the participants and their experiences with the issues. The following section is about the sense of belonging through Facebook and the common national feeling the participants expressed in the interviews. It is well known that Facebook provides features like sharing photos, posts, and videos between the users, which have been important features for the Kurds to convey their identity. Thus, the next section describes how the participants have used those features to express their identity through Facebook.

Further sections in this chapter are about cultural aspects publicized on Facebook and reconnecting with old friends and families.



## 5.1 The importance of Facebook for Kurds in the diaspora

One of the most popular social media sites is Facebook, which is also the main focus in this study. The use of Facebook among the Kurdish diaspora has given them a lot of opportunities to express their identity worldwide, and Facebook is clearly the most important social media site for my participants. The importance of Facebook underpins some of the questions which were used in the interview. One of the questions I asked the participants was: *Why do you use Facebook?*

The answers I gathered from participants were generally almost alike: they share the same opinion with some different reasons. The most common answer was to keep in touch with family and friends who live far away and cannot meet in real life.

*“I use Facebook mainly to get in contact with other people in geographical regions who I cannot meet directly.”* (Rahel)

*“In order to keep in touch with friends, acquaintances, and family that I’m not able to meet often.”* (Serkar)

*“It was also important for me to keep in touch with friends from school, outside school, relatives from my home country.”* (Valan)

*“First of all to keep in touch with all my friends and acquaintances that live far from where I live.”* (Sazan)

These answers clearly show that Kurds in the diaspora use Facebook as a communication tool to connect with other Kurds in their homeland and hostland. Though communication was quite difficult in past years, Facebook has made it easy for Kurds in the diaspora to reinforce their ties with other Kurds worldwide. The use of Facebook is also very important for discussing, sharing, and gathering information about Kurdistan.

*“The purpose of starting to use Facebook was that I got the opportunity to discuss topics of Kurdistan in different Facebook groups.” (Valan)*

*“To get more information about what is happening in my country and to become better acquainted with my culture (everything from literature, art, music, clothing, language / dialects, etc.)” (Sazan)*

*“In addition, Facebook is an important source of information for me when it comes to contemporary topics, news from my homeland, and this kind of stuff.” (Rahel)*

Accordingly, Facebook has been the primary and most imperative media source for all of the participants. It appears that the participants use Facebook to publish and receive Kurdish news, so they are always updated with information about their homeland. Most of my informants use Facebook many times a day. Facebook usage has become a daily habit for the participants who live a long distance from their homeland. All of them use Facebook daily, and some of them use it many times a day.

To recapitulate the answers for the question “What meaning does joining Facebook give you as a Kurd?” the answer is that the meaning of Facebook has been to help the participants feel free to express their thoughts and feelings and to show their identity in the diaspora, as Sazan explains:

*“Facebook for me has been the perfect place to present myself as a Kurd and to show my non-Kurdish friends what my culture is and what Kurdistan is.” (Sazan)*

It has given them the opportunity to show the world who Kurds are and to tell the world about the suffering Kurds have been through and that Kurdish population exists with its own identity, language, and culture.

## 5.2 Political platforms on Facebook

After what Kurdistan and Kurds have been through since being divided among four countries, the most important actions to liberate Kurdistan are political. Young Kurds have created and participated in numerous political organizations before using old media but have been infinitely more active since the emergence of new communication technology. At the beginning of Internet development, they created many Kurdish websites, where they published Kurdish news, mostly political news. The Internet gave Kurds a way to feel free to share their opinion on many political websites and in political discussion forums. Social media, especially Facebook, has opened much bigger opportunities for Kurds to discuss political issues with each other, and that is something extremely important when it comes to Kurdish people and the Kurdish question.

This opportunity benefits Kurds in the diaspora. They have been more active in transferring an important part of their political rhetoric, even their internal divergences, to the Internet. One indication of this is the great quantity of websites that belong to Kurdish political parties and their connected organizations, as well as the use of Facebook groups and pages for connecting people and discussing different topics, sharing opinions, and being active in political organizations.

The transnational connections between Kurds in the diaspora and the homeland have become drastically restricted by the Islamic regime in Iran, by the Turkish power in Turkey, and by Arabic power in Iraq and Syria. Even though all four countries have been trying to act against the oppositional websites and transnational connections, Kurdish people are using the Internet and social media to call for political action. Many of the participants of this study use Facebook actively for political issues; they consider Facebook an important tool for political discussion. Social media also provides access to information, and Facebook is a primary source of news and opinions from Kurds, as Serkar says:

*“I have the ability to learn about important political, social, economic, and trivial events that concern the Kurds and Kurdistan. Facebook gives me the opportunity to follow Kurdish society critics, thinkers, and enlightened Kurds.”* (Serkar)

It would be difficult for a young Kurd in the diaspora who has lived half or all his or her life outside the homeland to have knowledge about most Kurdish issues and themes, especially political issues. Therefore, they even consider Facebook as a learning tool to gather missing information about their background and about the current situation. The sharing of knowledge through Facebook friends' walls, sites, and groups gives them information they otherwise could not easily get outside of new communication technology. Some of them find the political discussion very educational, as Valan explains:

*"I mostly discuss the current situation in Kurdistan. I find it so instructive to participate in political activities on Facebook. I learn more and more every time I discuss certain themes with others."* (Valan)

One of the questions in the interview was about the discussions between Kurds on Facebook and the importance of those topics. From what the interviewees answered, I noticed that the usage of Facebook has engaged them in both political platform and public activities. But the most discussed topics between Kurds in Facebook involve the Kurdish question, i.e., the current situation in Kurdistan.

*"I discuss a lot of things with other Kurds, but the discussions are mostly about the situation in Kurdistan, political issues, and the future of an independent Kurdistan. The last mentioned is particularly important for me since I want to make most Kurds in the diaspora aware of the issue of an independent Kurdistan. This is particularly important if we want international recognition, since a strong facade that Kurds in the diaspora provide will have a greater impact on the world community than what Kurds in Kurdistan manage."* (Rahel)

Political issues and the developments in Kurdistan seem to be highlighted in many discussions on Facebook because, after all, all of them have the same wish: an independent Kurdistan.

*"The discussions are mainly about the developments in Kurdistan, the politics that Kurds engage in, and the advantages and disadvantages of political elections. It is*

*important to discuss the political because it has a strategic impact on us Kurds in the future and current situation. This leads to us sharing thoughts and making opinions about how the development is going on. Those types of discussions also provide a broader understanding about where the Kurds are headed to.” (Serkar)*

The participants mention political subjects several times throughout the interview, even when the question is not directly about political debate. They consider it as a needed or a “must” discussion in their life.

*“It is important to discuss the political because it has a strategic impact on us Kurds in the future and current situation.” (Serkar)*

As mentioned and on the basis of my interviews, political discussion occurs very frequently between Kurds on Facebook. Therefore, it is important to figure out what kind of political topics are discussed. They follow all political incidents and discussions that concern the Kurdish question. Some of them share and get involved more than others, and some of them keep it more to themselves and close friends.

*“I discuss it most with my close friends through private conversations on Facebook, and topics are mainly about the current political situation” (Serkar).*

Accordingly, there are various opinions about participating in political discussions. Even though many of them find it necessary and important to have political discussions on Facebook, there are still some who do not have the same interest. For those informants, cultural belonging is more important.

*“No, I don’t participate in political discussions because it is not my strongest interest.” (Hana)*

*“No, I almost never participate.” (Rojin)*

*“No, I don’t participate in political discussions on Facebook.” (Bina)*

## 5.3 Fellowship and association through Facebook

The one and only common feeling between Kurds in the diaspora would be the feeling of sharing the same ethnic identity, which includes the same language, culture, myth, ritual, and religion; for this I use the word *fellowship*. When someone lives outside the homeland, they often try to reinforce the important things that remind them about their existence and ethnic identity. Kurds in the diaspora are far from their vulnerable homeland and have kept this common feeling through their lifetime in the diaspora; they have created fellowship with their fellow Kurds both in the homeland and in the diaspora.

The feeling of fellowship was also discussed with the participants in the interview. Many of them feel a sense of belonging by talking to each other and feel the freedom to express their identity, especially when it comes to the two most important things: culture and politics. To some of the participants, political ideologies often become an obstacle to the formation of fellowship. To others, the fellowship feeling is compared more with the feeling of nationalism. One of participants talks about the fellowship feeling as a *national* feeling.

*“I notice that Kurdish national feeling is getting even stronger, especially among the younger generation in the Kurdish diaspora. I notice that in many group discussions on Facebook. Earlier many Kurds denied their identity, but now I feel like this has changed and they have gained a new consciousness of themselves as a Kurd. They are more conscious of their own culture, identity, and language.”* (Valan)

Association between Kurds seems to be very strong, according to the participants’ opinions. It has been very important to participate in social activities and various associations, to build a strong connection with each other, and to express common identity through Facebook. For most of them, the association comes from their same interest and same goal for the Kurdish question. They build their own groups and participate in various groups to become academically and socially active. Some of them associate more with Kurds who are more interested in political issues and others because of the same culture, tradition, religion, and language.

*“I feel connected with those who have a good overview of the situation in Kurdistan and who manage to lead an interesting and enlightening discussion. It is not important for me that we have the same thought or political affiliation. Most important is that we discuss and try to understand a different perspective regarding Kurdistan.” (Serkar)*

The interviewees were asked if they were in contact with more Kurds than non-Kurds on Facebook. The answers varied, but most of them were actually in contact with more Kurds than non-Kurds, and the reasons are common interests and that they felt more belonging by talking to other Kurds.

*“Usually we all have something in common, but I'm in contact with more Kurds than non-Kurds because we have a common cultural background, identity, and belonging, and it is usually easier to communicate with Kurds than non-Kurds because we usually share same thoughts and opinions on topics of Kurdistan.” (Valan)*

They share opinions and thoughts with each other, share views, and learn everything about history, geography, culture, and identity to provide a broader understanding about Kurdistan. It seems to be very important to the Kurds to help each other and be there for each other, and as mentioned, they consider Facebook to be an educational tool to learn about their roots and existence. As Valan said:

*“It is important for me to share my experiences and viewpoints, also to hear other viewpoints. I actively participate in group discussions on Facebook. I think it's really educational. We learn to share views, we learn to discuss without worrying.” (Valan)*

## **5.4 Censorship and controversy on Facebook**

One of the interesting questions was about the problems participants have had on Facebook. According to the participants, Kurds have experienced problems on Facebook because of their ethnic identity. One of them has even had her Facebook account deleted more than five times because of her nationalist attitude and disagreement with Turks.

*“I have experienced that several times. I used to discuss the conflict about Kurdistan and Turkey with Kurds and Turks on various Facebook groups, and it always ended with disagreement and even quarrel. Then my Facebook account usually got removed by Facebook administration. Turks were good at reporting my posts. They even used to write visible messages to each other reporting my posts, so my Facebook account used to be blocked and removed. My Facebook account has been removed at least five times, as far I can remember.”* (Valan)

She claims that she discussed the conflict about Kurdistan and Turkey in various Facebook groups and it always ended with quarrel and disagreement. Therefore Turks used to report her posts and even her Facebook account several times, until she stopped getting involved in discussions and started to realize that she can get a more accurate picture and understanding if she discussed with her fellow countrymen instead of Turks. Another interesting incident with the same participant was having her Facebook profile hacked by Turks.

*“My Facebook profile was even hacked by Turks; they posted pictures of the Turkish flag and Turkish president in my profile.”* (Valan)

According to one of the participants, heated discussions have occurred with Turks with anti-Kurdish attitudes, many ruthless things have been said about Kurds, and there has been extensive use of control techniques against those who support the pan-Kurdish. Publishing maps of Kurdistan and the Kurdish flag or Kurdish political leaders has also led to removed accounts on Facebook.

*“This has created some problematic discussions where many ruthless things have been said about Kurds, and there has been extensive use of control techniques against we who support the pan-Kurdish.”* (Serkar)

Kurds have had many issues with Facebook, issues that I personally have been affected by. Last year a leaked copy of Facebook’s internal policies showed that the site does not allow statements that support the struggle for Kurdish independence. The leaked document (see figure 3) states, among other things, that all attacks in



pictures or text about Atatürk (see chapter 2) are absolutely prohibited. The same is true about the map and flag of Kurdistan and images showing the Turkish flag burning, PKK (the Kurdistan Workers' Party)<sup>20</sup> support and depiction, and Abdullah "Apo" Öcalan<sup>21</sup>—related content. This was also confirmed by one of the participants:

*"I have not yet experienced any problems on Facebook because of my identity, but I know many who had their profile deleted because they had published a map of Kurdistan, the Kurdish flag, and pictures of Kurdish political leaders. I have actively shared the Kurdistan map and Kurdish flag but have so far not encountered any problems."* (Rahel)

Most Kurds were astonished and outraged by Facebook's discriminatory policy towards Kurdistan, including its secret ban on Kurdish maps. This discrimination made Kurdish people all over the world agitate for revolution and launch campaigns on Facebook itself to use the Kurdish flag, map, and even Apo's pictures as their profile picture to condemn this act and send Facebook and Turkey a clear message that they will not tolerate this bizarre policy. Facebook followed the Turkish law in order not to be banned from Turkey, as YouTube was banned a few years ago. But if we look this case in another way, even though they try to not allow the Kurdish people to practice freedom and defend themselves, Facebook can still be a very good tool to fight for an independent Kurdistan and Kurds' rights in all parts of Kurdistan and in the diaspora.

Facebook did not want to comment on details of the rules but only referred to the general rules available on the web. Frida Lövengren, representing Facebook in the Nordic countries,<sup>22</sup> confirmed in a statement: "We do not comment on individual cases, but I can confirm that all reports of inappropriate content are examined and evaluated from one case to another."

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<sup>20</sup> PKK is a Kurdish organization which has been fighting an armed struggle since 1984 against the Turkish state for an autonomous Kurdistan and greater cultural and political rights for the Kurds in Turkey (Wikipedia, Kurdistan Workers' Party 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Abdullah Öcalan is a founding member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (Wikipedia, Abdullah Öcalan 2013).

A 17-page document<sup>23</sup> was posted on the website Gawker.com by an employee from the company oDesk, a subcontractor of moderator services to large international network services like Facebook. According to the document, the rules that moderator has to deal with were “complaints” from Facebook, and they are very detailed in most of the areas.

**Abuse Standards Violations**

All the items below should be confirmed; anything not on this list can be unconfirmed

**Sex and Nudity**

- Any OBVIOUS sexual activity, even if naked parts are hidden from view by hands, clothes or other objects. Cartoons/art included. Foreplay allowed (Kissing, groping, etc.). even for same sex (man-man/woman-woman)
- Naked 'private parts' including female nipple bulges and naked butt cracks; male nipples are ok.
- Pixelated or black-barred content showing nudity or sexual activity as above.
- Naked children, including cartoon versions (able to stand on their own) and older minors - **Escalate if unsure of sexual context (child porn)**
- Depiction of sexual assault or rape in any form.
- Mothers breastfeeding without clothes on.
- Escalate** bestiality, necrophilia, and pedophilia. Confirm cartoon/digital versions BUT **escalate** if content is promoting.
- Digital/cartoon nudity. Art nudity ok.
- People "using the bathroom".
- Blatant (obvious) depiction of camel toes and moose knuckles.
- Sex toys or other objects, but only in the context of sexual activity.
- Depicting sexual fetishes in any form.

**Illegal Drug Use**

- Unconfirm all marijuana unless context is clear that the poster is selling, buying/growing.
- Illegal drugs shown NOT in the context of medical, academic or scientific study.

**Notes:**

- Hate symbols are confirmed if there's no context OR if hate phrases are used
- Humor overrules hate speech UNLESS slur words are present or the humor is not evident.

**Theft Vandalism and Fraud**

- Praising or displaying crimes that they or their friends committed
- Organizing criminal activity or soliciting illegal services.
- Encouraging others to engage in criminal activity.
- Escalate** based on credibility assessment

**Hate Content**  
(Valid Name Match not required)

- Slurs or racial comments of any kind
- Attacking based on protected category
- Hate symbols, either out of context or in the context of hate phrases or support of hate groups.
- Showing support for organizations and people primarily known for violence.
- Depicting symbols primarily known for hate and violence, unless comments are clearly against them.
- "Versus photos" or "Vs photos": photos comparing two people side by side.
- Any photoshopped images of people, whether negative, positive or neutral
- Images of drunk and unconscious people, or sleeping people with things drawn on their faces.
- Videos: Street/bar/schoolyard fights even if no valid name match is found. School fight videos are only confirmed if the video has been posted to continue tormenting the person targeted in the video.

**Graphic Content**

- Content showing Poster's delight in/involvement in/promoting of/encouraging of violence against humans or animals for sadistic purposes (e.g. torture, staged animal fights, animal starvation, obvious neglect, etc.)
- Depicting the mutilation of people or animals, or decapitated, dismembered, charred, or burning humans.
- Poaching of animals should be confirmed. Poaching of endangered animals should be **escalated**
- Urine, feces, vomit, semen, pus, and ear wax. (Cartoon feces, urine and spit are OK; real and cartoon snot is OK)
- Violent speech (Example: "I love hearing skulls crack")
- Photos and digital images showing internal organs, bone, muscle, tendons, etc. Deep flesh wounds are ok to show; excessive blood is ok to show.
- Crushed heads, limbs, etc are ok as long as no insides are showing

**Note:** No exception for news or awareness related content.

**IP Blocks and International Compliance**

**Escalated:**

- Holocaust denial which focuses on hate speech
- All attacks on Ataturk (visual and text)
- Maps of Kurdistan (Turkey)
- Burning Turkish flag(s)

**Confirmed (unless clearly against PKK and/or Ocalan):**

- PKK support and depiction
- Abdullah "Apo" Ocalan-related content

**Self Harm**

**Note:** All self harm content should be **escalated**.

- Threat and serious promotion of suicide.
- Supporting people, groups, and symbols that advocates and promoting eating disorders as a lifestyle choice.
- Depicting self-mutilation and groups and people that promote and support it (ex: cutting groups)

**Bullying and Harassment**

- Valid name matches no matter what the content is (negative, positive or neutral)
- Contacting other users persistently without prior solicitation or continue to do so when the other party has said that they want no other further contact with the sender.
- Attacking anyone based on their status as a sexual assault or rape victim.

**Credible Threats**  
(Escalate as per credibility assessment)

- Credible threats or incitement of physical harm against anyone
- Credible indications of organizing acts of present or future violence
- Any threats of violence against Heads of State (HOS) or Law Enforcement Officers (LEO) should always be **escalated** even if not credible
- Any credible indication of terrorist activity or organized past/future crime.

Figure 3: Abuse Standards Violations. Published by Gawker (Gawker 2012)

According to Aftenposten, Lövendren does not confirm directly that they use oDesk as a subcontractor but writes in an e-mail that the company is “keen to have a quick and efficient process around the processing of millions of reports about unwanted content they receive from their users every day.” Lövendren also

<sup>19</sup> (Aftenposten 2013)

<sup>20</sup> (Gawker 2012)

claims that such subcontractors are “under strict control, and that they could only see the content itself, completely anonymously, during this process” (my translation). What Facebook answered about the leaked document was that “this must be regarded as a snapshot of the rules that one of these subcontractors has to deal with” (Aftenposten 2012).

This incident made all Kurds in the diaspora react and connect together to campaign and revolt against the new rules on Facebook. This bizarre policy was spread around among friends and families on Facebook to share Kurdish flags and maps on their Facebook profile to show Kurdish existence to Turkey and the rest of the world. This helped give Kurds in the diaspora a common identity to show their availability on social network sites and strengthen their connection with each other.

Kurds are still affected by this type of issue on Facebook, even for writing posts about Turkey and political problems in the country. One of my participants was affected by a complication when he wrote a post about political issues in Turkey which occurred some months ago.

*“Yes, I have experienced that many times. I have experienced that some of my posts on Facebook have been removed automatically without my being told or warned about it. Last time this happened was two weeks ago when I posted an article about what is happening now in Istanbul, in Taksim. The post was not racist at all; it was plain criticism and a little history about Turkey. The next day I found out that the article does not exist anymore on my Facebook wall. It is the case that Facebook has set up a rule on the use of Kurdish flags; they have removed users who have used the Kurdish flag or posted racist things about Turkey and Atatürk. That’s very sad that something like that could happen on Facebook. Facebook is, as far as everyone knows, against all dictatorial systems, but that they themselves introduce such a rule is absolutely pathetic.”* (Hezan)

The complications are not that large for the other participants in this study, but as mentioned in the previous chapter, not all participants are politically active or are nationalist on Facebook. It is more likely that most of the complications happening in Facebook are because of political action and discussions because when I asked some

participants if they had experienced any problem through Facebook, the answers were as follows:

*“No, because I haven’t participated in any groups which are against Kurds. I am not politically active on Facebook because those who often have complications on Facebook are those who participate actively in political discussions and groups, and often share their opinion of things said against Kurds.”* (Hana)

*“No, I’ve never had any problems because of my ethnic identity because I am very passive when it comes to political discussions. I don’t remember when I last participated in a political discussion on Facebook.”* (Rojin)

As for two other participants, the complications were far less political but more about opinions and discussion about Kurdish religion and culture. Also, there is less disagreement and misunderstanding about things they share or comment.

*“Yes, I have experienced problems. For example, when someone shares articles from other websites and online newspapers that write about Kurdish religion and culture, which can lead to disagreements and lack of understanding, and this can be very frustrating.”* (Bina)

*“Until now I have not experienced anything like it. There have been misunderstandings, but they have not led to any major problems. It has either come to a common agreement or each side has accepted the other’s opinions and speculation.”* (Sazan)

## **5.5 A sense of belonging in Facebook**

Non-state ethnic groups in particular use the Internet and social network sites to empower their status and gain the dignity and pride they lacked when they were oppressed in their homelands. The sense of belonging that the Kurds have built up can be seen through the framework of Benedict Anderson’s theory of “the imagined community” (Anderson 1992, 224). According to Anderson, a group of people can

feel solidarity and association despite the fact that they are spread over large distances and that they may not be able to communicate and meet in reality. This can describe the Kurds' situation. Just knowing that they all exist is enough to feel a sense of belonging to each other. As Piet Bakker mentions in his research study "New Nationalism: The Internet Crusade," people who are unified by ethnicity share the same language or the same feeling that they belong to the same community (Bakker 2001, 13).

*"The Kurds have a strong bond to Kurdistan and showing their Kurdish identity clearly."* (Serkar)

*"I sense the belonging with other Kurds because we come from the same place, we speak the same language, and we share the same culture and tradition."* (Rojin)

The increase in usage of Facebook among Kurds in the diaspora helps them to rebuild their national identity and awareness of nationhood. Some of the participants described a nationalistic feeling when they were asked: Do you have a sense of belonging when you are in contact with other Kurds on Facebook? Can you describe the feeling, or an experience?

*"There are many forms of belonging that are important for a person. National identity is crucial for me when I am in contact with other Kurds on Facebook. Knowing that one belongs to a realm, a nation is something one cannot deny. This feeling of belongingness is especially visible on Kurdish National Day, or important events in Kurdish history, or the tragedies that frame Kurds."* (Valan)

*"Nationalist feeling first and foremost. I feel that something is tying us together, although I do not know a person, but there is still a feeling that makes the connection and understanding."* (Sazan)

Anderson calls this *long-distance nationalism* (1992), "a nationalism that no longer depends as it once did on territorial location in a home country." It arises to a large extent from the initiative of many devoted and competent individuals who live in

different Western societies. The political principles can also give Kurds a sense of belonging because they all share the same thought about the future of Kurdistan.

*“The sense of belonging is very strong when I meet Kurds who share the same goals as me, and that they simply look into the future and put problems in perspective. I am very strongly influenced when I meet Kurds who have managed to get out of political ideologies and is not supporting any political parties, but rather working for the final goal, namely an independent Kurdistan.”* (Rahel)

It allows disparate people to imagine themselves as nations and the disenfranchised who otherwise would not have one to amplify their voice and their causes (Sheyholislami 2011, 179). McDowall’s idea, stated by Sheyholislami, is that diasporas have been home to the early ideas of Kurdish nationalism (ibid.). According to Bakker, nationalism is very visible and flourishing on the Internet, and the Kurds are one of the nationalistic movements on the web (Bakker 2001, 2-4).

Every possible movement can be found; there are websites, chat channels, newsgroups and mailing lists. And the same conflicts that accompany “real life” movements accompany the virtual ones. (ibid.)

The nationalist movements emerged before the Internet; they are not a consequence of the Internet. But the content of “this new medium is more than an old medium, because there’s no or very little regulation the tone can be much more outspoken” (Bakker 2001, 4). In other words, new media have diminished the importance of time and space by offering the Kurds a cyberspace where they can express their identity and reinforce Kurdish nationalism. This is also emphasized by my informants:

*“I feel a sense of belonging when I join a Kurdish group on Facebook that I like and they share the same interest as me. It makes me feel that I’m with my own people, and this gives me a sense of national belonging and identity. I get this feeling when people share interesting posts about Kurdistan, like new and old information, that I learn something from either way.”* (Bina)

The question about the sense of belonging gave different impressions to the participant and had different meanings for each of the participants. While for some it gives the feeling of nationalism, for others it lies more in the communication part with other Kurds, especially families and friends. They feel the belonging by seeking for roots and then strengthening their connection with it. The sense of belonging shows up when they communicate with fellow Kurds in the homeland and discuss daily events and small Kurdish things.

*“When I talk to someone on Facebook who lives in Kurdistan and they tell me the details of what they are doing, how they live, where they go, etc., in that very special moment I feel like I am with them. It feels like I belong at home, and it feels like I really want to go back home. When my friends share a photo of a special Kurdish food, of a natural image of motherland, my feelings go back to my home country and I feel like I belong there. Besides that, I often talk about Kurdistan and share posts and pictures with my friends for it gives us the sense of belonging to something we have in common.”* (Hana)

For another participant, the sense of belonging was more about the sharing of posts in Facebook in the form of pictures of nature, maps, and places in Kurdistan. They feel associated with these objects because they know that they belong to a place, they own Kurdish cultural belongings, and they have a Kurdish map which they proudly share.

*“When a Kurd posts a picture of Kurdistan, a Kurdish map, or an image of a place in Kurdistan, my heart beats faster just because I feel the sense of belonging to it, because I’m a Kurd and from Kurdistan. Although we do not have an independent country and although we are not together, we have retained our culture one hundred percent. Therefore, people are more Kurdish, in a way, when you share the kind of image or text about Kurdistan or the Kurdish issue. I feel more affinity through the sharing of things that have to do with Kurdistan, by me and others on Facebook.”* (Hezan)

## 5.6 Conveying Identity through Facebook

As mentioned in earlier chapters, Kurds for a long time have been denied the right to express themselves socially, politically, and culturally. Many Kurds in the diaspora faced difficulties using the Internet for political or cultural activities even until the early 2000s; few households had even access to computers, according to Sheyholislami (Sheyholislami 2011, 90).

But with the increasing number of Kurdish websites and access to many social network sites, they can easily share their opinions and express their identity, which has been very strong through Facebook especially. As a virtual community they can now convey their Kurdish identity through the Internet. The fact that people participate in online discussions, chat with others, and seek or exchange information could have an influence on identity, and this could be important for people for their ethnic or group identity and is hoped to strengthen political participation (Bakker 2001, 11). The participants in this study convey their ethnic identity through online sharing of pictures, cultural production, and political and national symbols. This has led them to a community of Kurds on Facebook.

*“I’m able to convey my Kurdish identity through photos, discussions, quotes, newspaper articles, etc. on Facebook. I feel that this is counted as positive and I manage to create a community with most of the Kurds.”* (Rahel)

*“I always convey my national identity through, for example, Kurdish national symbols that create a sense of belonging.”* (Valan)

Participants are able to share important pictures, articles, news, symbols, Kurdish music, and videos, and also revisit old Kurdish poets, famous quotes, and sayings. These activities make them feel that they are a part of a cultural and national community. According to Katerina Diamandaki, who writes about virtual ethnicity in cyberspace, many national and ethnic identities of virtual diasporas present symbols, texts, and images in homepages as an indication of their identity (Diamandaki 2003).



In online dialogue, ethnicities are either consciously projected by individuals or unconsciously “given off” in the process of conversation. These are all online expressions of ethnicity. (ibid.)

The participants therefore share various items on Facebook to reconnect the ties and reinforce their national identity. They consider it an important part for expressing identities and increasing the self-possession and the pride because of the oppression in their homeland. These symbols and pictures they are sharing on Facebook are used to rebuild their national and ethnic identity.

*“I convey it through my sharing on Facebook; I share photos very often, but spend most time writing posts on Facebook. I convey the Kurdish issue through my posts, update people on what’s happening constantly, especially on political issues where I know people are not as interested in investigating themselves.” (Hezan)*

Before social media, the Internet was teeming with electronic pages, discussion groups, and communities of an ethnic, tribal or national character. Many online “diasporic” communities allowed dispersed individuals of a common ethnic or national background to connect with one another on a global level. Most of them were created by individuals or groups of individuals (Diamandaki 2003). Facebook groups used today work the same way; individuals create groups and gather many Kurds at the same place, where they can be connected with each other and strengthen their ethnic identity.

One thing that was very clear in the interviews was that the informants have often used the Kurdish flag on Facebook, despite difficulties they have met there. The Kurdish flag is the strongest symbol that indicates the national identity of Kurds.

*“The Kurdish flag represents what Kurds stand for. I use the Kurdish flag everywhere on my Facebook profile, and I have many pictures of myself with the Kurdish flag. I’m also very good at posting pictures of myself with Kurdish clothes on Facebook. This is about feeling part of a cultural and national community.” (Valan)*

It is the most important symbol used on Kurdish Internet sites and Kurdish Facebook profiles, “considered a common and familiar symbol of *Kurdishness*” (Sheyholislami 2011, 164). Another thing some of the participants mentioned was the use of Kurdish national clothes, which they proudly use and share pictures of on Facebook.

*“Everyone on my Facebook friend list knows that I am a Kurd. I have many pictures with Kurdish costumes with friends, where the picture was taken during a Kurdish party or a national celebration, not to mention the picture of the Kurdistan flag. There are several videos of us from the student organization including the national parties, demonstrations, cultural evening, seminars, etc. This leads to communion between me and other Kurds, and I thereby convey my Kurdish identity through sharing those.”* (Rojin)

Kurdistan does not yet have an official map, but based on the original map before the first division of Kurdistan in 1514, there is a map for the Kurdish area, which has also seen changes throughout history. Some of the maps of Kurdistan are produced by the Kurdish Institute of Paris.<sup>24</sup>

In a study about Kurdish nationalism and the use of the map, Zeynep Kaya claims that Kurdish nationalism has been quite successful in the promotion of the notion of Kurdistan and its maps to international society (Kaya 2012, 14). Generally, the map of Kurdistan is very often used in the homeland but is also commonly used in the rhetoric of almost all Kurdish nationalist organizations and activist groups in the diaspora. The map of Kurdistan can be useful “for presenting ethicists’ views because a territory with clear boundaries depicted on the map gives the message that the people inhabiting the territories within the borders of the map are homogenous” (ibid.). The map of Kurdistan has also been effectively used by the participants of this study in Facebook to convey a message.

*“I use nationalist symbols, the Kurdish flag, and a map of Kurdistan.”* (Sazan)

*“I have actively shared the Kurdistan map and the Kurdish flag.”* (Rahel)

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<sup>24</sup> Kurdish Institute of Paris, “The Kurdish Diaspora” (Institutkurde 2013)

For one of the participants, Facebook has been an important tool to use against every attempt of falsification of Kurdish culture and identity, past and present. As she states:

*“As a Kurd it is very important for me to stand against each attempt of falsification of our culture and identity, past and present, on Facebook.”* (Valan)

## **5.7 Cultural aspects publicized on Facebook**

There are many ideas about what culture is and many definitions of the term. Edward B. Taylor, British culture researcher from the 1800s, defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor 1920, 1). Culture involves behaviors, habits, traditions, norms, and rules. It is also about shared history and not least a common understanding of the history. Beyond this, culture is strengthened through common language, symbolic values, clothes, and music. All this gives us a sense of national identity and belonging.

The Kurdish national identity is not only manifested tribe, kinship, language, religion, or history. There are some other cultural traits which have important primary roles in fostering Kurdish nationalism, such as literature, folklore, art, and music.<sup>25</sup> Meho and Maglaughlin claim that Kurdish literature has retained its originality and has developed and contributed to the consolidation of national feeling, despite the supremacy of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian (Meho and Maglaughlin 2001, 8-9).

Kurdish literature, be it romantic or realist, written or oral, contemporary or old, was and still is, a mirror of the Kurdish people through which they recognize the beauty and greatness of their country as well as the poverty and denial that are imposed on them. (ibid.)

There is no clear distinction between oral and written cultures among Kurds; all these cultures are intermingled historically, despite separation of the literate elite from the

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted by O’Shea (Meho and Maglaughlin 2001, 8).

larger illiterate class in society (Magin 2012, 5). Therefore, aspects of Kurdish culture have been the most common formation between Kurds in the homeland and in the diaspora because “throughout history wherever Kurds have resided, there have been social and political situations that have encumbered the development of Kurdish society and culture” (ibid.).

The participants of this study expressed the same behaviors in the interviews; they also pointed out some cultural characteristics in different ways. Some of the participants mentioned poetry when they were interviewed, and poetry has a great cultural significance. Sharing and conveying identity in Facebook can be seen through cultural aspects in, for example, poetry:

*“I convey my Kurdish identity in different ways. One of them is through my Kurdish poems. I have been writing poems for many years. I wasn’t able to publish them before. But through Facebook and the Kurdish groups that I am member of, I have published them. In that way the Kurdish people are able to read them. Kurdish poetry is one of the oldest belongings of Kurdish culture and plays a crucial role in Kurdish ethnic identity. I want to be one of those people who keep the poetry alive and send it to the next generation.”* (Hana)

Most of the literature written by Kurds before the twentieth century consisted of poetry, and poetry is still usually used to transmit cultural information. According to many historians, the history of Kurdish poetry goes back to the sixteenth century, after the rise of the Ottoman Empire, when they began to reinforce existing Kurdish principalities (Magin 2012, 6). Even though most Kurdish literature was poetic, Kurdish prose did not develop until newspapers and magazines were created in the twentieth century (Blau 1996 23; Magin 2012: 8). Because of the suppression of the Kurdish language by Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, Kurdish poets could not publish their books of poetry; it was forbidden in Turkey and Syria for decades. As for the Kurds in Iran, the poetry books were censored and scrutinized, and many of them were not even allowed to be published. Hence, many intellectuals in Turkey chose exile during the 1980s and found their way to Europe and other Western countries, where they experienced their greatest freedom of expression (Magin 2012, 18). The

freedom of expression in Iraq began to develop greatly in 1991 and has continued until today, and “there is much activity in all forms of literature” (ibid.) in the area.

The opportunities today are far freer than before; there are many more ways to express and present Kurdish poetry through, for example, Facebook. Many groups and pages made by Kurds on Facebook present poems written in Kurdish. Some of them bring the old poems to life by rewriting it on Facebook pages and even writing about most famous Kurdish poets in history. There are also young Kurds who are writing their own poems using the same structure as the old poetry or who like reading and sharing poetry through Facebook, as some of the participants of this study mentioned during the interview.

## **5.8 Reconnecting with lost contacts**

There are many reasons why people around the world use Facebook. The sentence “people using Facebook in extraordinary ways”<sup>26</sup> was the header of an interesting website where people tell their stories about the use of Facebook. One of the most inspirational and touching stories is that of Mayank Sharma, a man with a disease that makes him forget everything. He starts to browse through his history list in the computer and then realizes that Facebook has the ability to suggest people he may know.<sup>27</sup> He finds this tool very helpful to connect with people and ask them if he knows them.

People You May Know: Shows you the names and pictures of people you likely know. These people are selected for you based on commonalities like where you live or work or how many friends you have in common. (Abram 2013: 11)

After a while he ends up with many friends whom he has known in his life and has a shared story with. All his friends share old memories with him, which helps him to

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<sup>26</sup> (Facebookstories n.d.)

<sup>27</sup> Video: People you may know (Jordan 2012)

collect all his memories and get his life back. The main point of the story, and all other stories shared on the website, is that Facebook's purpose is to connect people.

One of my participant's stories in this study resembles the story above but in a different way.

*"I recently was reunited with some of my old friends from the primary school I attended in Kurdistan. Some of them managed to find me and start to communicate with me through Facebook messaging, and then I started to link to other friends whom I knew at the same time. Facebook suggested that I may know some of the people after I was connected with the first friend I talked to. This connection with my old friends gave me a good feeling and reminded me of old days I spent with them in Kurdistan: funny memories we shared in the classroom, things we had been through together, friendship problems and gossip conversations we had together, and even the sad moment when we said goodbye the time I left my homeland and came to Europe. I actually started to look in my old albums which I brought with me from Kurdistan, and found many old pictures taken with my friends at school and during our free time together. It was really nice to have the ability to talk to my old friends in this way and share all our old pictures with each other through Facebook. The last time I remember we had long-distance communication was through paper letters which took months to arrive."* (Hana)

As mentioned by this participant, she has been reconnecting with her old friends, which is a fairly safe assumption that she is able to find a childhood friend she has been meaning to catch up with (Abram 2013, 13). Abram claims that "as Facebook grows, it becomes more likely that anyone with whom you are trying to communicate can be reached" (ibid.), and this was confirmed by the participant who was able to find many of her old friends. Facebook, as the biggest online community, with 750 million users, makes it easy to find lost friends and family members, and "the more people there are in the community, the more likely it is that the person you are looking for is there" (Miller 2011, 43-44). The story of the participant mentioned above was very touching and confirmed that Kurds in the diaspora use Facebook mainly to reconnect with old friends. Apparently she is not the only person who uses the Facebook tool to reconnect with her old friends; Michael Miller, the author of

*Facebook for Grown-Ups: Use Facebook to Reconnect with Old Friends, Family, and Co-Workers*, has also experienced the same:

Personally, I've used Facebook to connect with my old high school and college friends; some of whom I hadn't talked to in more than twenty years. It took a bit of work, but after I made a few initial contacts, the others started to pour in. it's a matter of working through the connections, literally finding friends of friends. (Miller 2011, 44)

In another study done by Nicole B. Ellison, Charles Steinfield, and Cliff Lampe, 800 undergraduate students took a survey where, among other things, they were questioned about their use of Facebook to connect with existing offline contacts (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007, 1151). The participants of the study "overwhelmingly used Facebook to keep in touch with old friends and to maintain or intensify relationships characterized by some form of offline connection such as dormitory proximity or a shared class" (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007, 1162). The study showed that people on Facebook are searching for old friends rather than looking for new friends.

In addition to reconnecting with old friends, my informants use Facebook to connect with family members in the homeland. The long distance makes it difficult for people in the diaspora to meet family members in real life, and therefore they find social media tools very helpful to retain and reinforce the relationships with close family members and other relatives. The following quotes express some of the participants' feelings about the importance of Facebook to keep in contact with family members in the homeland.

*"I feel connected when I'm talking with other Kurds on Facebook. There is a bonus with social media where you easily get in touch with old friends and family members. It maintains regular contact that was difficult before, and therefore the communication on Facebook makes a strong connection between me and other Kurds."* (Bina)

*“I think that Facebook is very useful, especially to keep in touch with all family members, relatives, and friends, wherever they are located.” (Rojin)*

*“In order to keep in touch with friends, acquaintances, and family that I’m not able to meet often.” (Serkar)*

*“Because of the distance between me and my family and friends in my homeland and in other countries in Europe, I find Facebook as a useful and important platform for communication.” (Hana)*



## 6 Conclusion

The Internet offers many opportunities, especially when it comes to social network sites. There are opportunities for binding of social ties and personal experiences through various services, and the Internet allows communication worldwide. Internet services have managed to reform the relation between Kurds in the diaspora and social connections in many ways. It has helped the Kurdish community in diaspora to reconnect with their fellow Kurds both in the diaspora and in their homeland, which used to be very difficult before the development of communication technology.

Communication through social media has improved essential community reinforcement, especially for the Kurds, which constitute a nation under the occupation of Arab, Turkish, and Persian oppressors and have been denied the freedom of speech. Social media functions as a free media for Kurds, in the homeland and the diaspora, to access and share information about their homeland, Kurdistan. Social media also gives them the opportunity to express themselves and their identity more freely than they could before with old media. The main social media site researched in this study is Facebook, and the purpose was to explore how and whether Kurds in the diaspora express a common ethnic identity through Facebook.

The results of this study, including the results of the interview, showed that Kurds in the diaspora use Facebook as a place to meet their fellow Kurds and discuss different issues and topics with each other, to be connected with long-distance families and friends in the diaspora and the homeland, and to reconnect with lost contacts. Kurds consider Facebook to be a place where they get a sense of belonging with each other and to their nationality. It helps them to rebuild their national and ethnic identity. Through Facebook, Kurds can build their own groups and participate in various groups to gather academic knowledge and to be socially active. This also leads to a strong association and fellowship between the Kurds.

For the Kurds, Facebook has become one of the most utilized media for identity expression online and to be active in important aspects of their life, like cultural and political aspects. Kurds in the diaspora also use Facebook actively to spread political

messages, discuss different political issues, and share political news with others. One of the most important political topics is the Kurdish question and which discussions are in favor of a free Kurdistan. Cultural characteristics like literature, poetry, folklore, art, and music are also shared through Facebook.

The study also found that Kurds use Facebook in many different ways to convey their identity, both national and ethnic. They consider Facebook features to be important tools to share posts, pictures, and national symbols with each other and with people who have little information about Kurds and Kurdistan. Through this type of conveying, they are strengthening their identity.

Despite the difficulty and the oppression the Kurdish people have been through, they have managed to find a way to express themselves, speak freely, and inform people worldwide about their history and the situation they find themselves in today. But even social media has made it difficult to let them be fully free to express themselves. Another finding of this study is that Facebook has conducted its own censorship with the Kurds. Participants have either had complications or heard about the censorship in Facebook. The study finds that they are not allowed to share political and national symbols like pictures of leaders, flags, and Kurdish maps, nor are they allowed to participate in discussions with the people who have occupied their county. Kurds on Facebook have experienced deleting of posts, pictures, and even complete Facebook accounts.

In conclusion, social media can be very useful for Kurds in the diaspora to build their own networks and share experiences, ideas, and content with each other and worldwide. However, it can be used as a revolutionary way for building hopes and maybe one day to give the Kurds the right to raise their voice for the liberty of Kurdistan because they are no longer dependent on the old media to tell their story, which for many years was manipulated by Turkish, Arabic, and Persian media. Along with each individual's attempt to express themselves and present their land, there are many Kurdish satellite television channels and Internet websites that share daily news about Kurdistan and the Kurdish people. Kurds were spread across four main countries and in the diaspora, but now they are getting closer every day through social network sites, and they want to be connected.

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## 8 Appendix

This appendix contains the interview-guide and all participants' answers to interview questions.

### 8.1 The interview guide

#### 1. Personal fact

- Name:
- Age:
- Education:
- From (city in Kurdistan):
- Lived in diaspora/outside the home country in (month/year):

#### 2. Background information for the study

The important research question of this study is to explore and examine whether and how Kurds in the diaspora express a common ethnic identity through Facebook. I have made some supplementary questions that can support the main research question. One of the important supplementary questions is: which motives and purposes do Kurds in the diaspora have for using Facebook as a social networking site? I will explore the various reasons that help as a motivation for users to reinforce their identity and connect with their homeland. I would also investigate whether there are any practical purposes to use Facebook for political engagement, or mainly used to share information, discuss various issues with other Kurds. Other supplementary questions is what topics are discussed when Kurds communicate with each other through Facebook? How and whether has Facebook become important for Kurds in the diaspora?

### **3. Interview questions**

1. Why do you use Facebook?
2. How often do you use Facebook?
3. What meaning does joining Facebook give you as a Kurd?
4. Are you in contact with more Kurds than non-Kurds on Facebook? If so, why?
5. What do you discuss with other Kurds on Facebook? Why is this important to you?
6. Do you feel fellowship with other Kurds you talk to? Why or why not?
7. Have you experienced problems through Facebook because of your ethnic identity? If yes, what kind of problems?
8. Do you participate in political discussions on Facebook? What is spoken about in political discussions on Facebook?
9. Do you feel associated to other Kurds who you are in contact with on Facebook? Why or why not?
10. Do you have a sense of belonging when you are in contact with other Kurds on Facebook? Can you describe the feeling, or an experience?
11. How do you convey your Kurdish identity through Facebook? (Images, cultural production, political symbols, etc.). Does this lead to a community between you and other Kurds?
12. What do you think is most important to convey about your identity as a Kurd?
13. What more would you say about the importance of Facebook?

## 8.2 Interview questions and answers

### 1. Why do you use Facebook?

**Rahel:** *I use Facebook mainly to get in contact with other people in geographical regions who I cannot meet directly. In addition Facebook is an important source of information for me when it comes to contemporary topics, news from my homeland, and this kind of stuff.*

**Serkar:** *In order to keep in touch with friends, acquaintances, and family that I'm not able to meet often, as well to be updated in things and areas that I'm interested in.*

**Valan:** *The purpose of starting to use Facebook was that I got the opportunity to discuss topics of Kurdistan in different Facebook groups. It was also important for me to keep in touch with friends from school, outside school, relatives from my home country, and people that I knew around.*

**Sazan:** *There are various types of reasons. First of all to keep in touch with all my friends and acquaintances that live far from where I live, to get more information about what is happening in my country and to become better acquainted with my culture (everything from literature, art, music, clothing, language / dialects, etc.).*

**Hezan:** *It is actually very good question, why do we use Facebook? I use Facebook because everyone else uses it, because I can update us about people we know, I can also be updated on things happening both around us and in the world. I use Facebook as a communication tool.*

**Bina:** *To keep in touch with people, share information and knowledge, to spread the message you will find useful.*

**Hana:** *There are two reasons why I use Facebook. One of them is the personal reason, which means I use Facebook as a tool that can link me with my old and new friends. We share ideas, pictures, and news. The other reason is getting updated.*

*Facebook is a great place to update yourself by liking the pages that you have most interest for. For me the most interesting pages are music, poem, fashion, and scientific pages.*

**Rojin:** *I like to be updated on Facebook to see what my friends do daily and read news. I also like to follow many Kurdish pages where I read Kurdish poetry and stories, and sometimes political news.*

## **2. How often do you use Facebook?**

**Rahel:** *I use Facebook several times in a day.*

**Serkar:** *Daily.*

**Valan:** *I use Facebook way too often, several times in a day. Because there is always new updates and news I have to read, new discussions that I need to participate in and new photos that I can look at.*

**Sazan:** *Several times daily.*

**Hezan:** *I use it very often. Now that we have the smartphones, Facebook is available and updated all the time. Therefore I'm very up to date on Facebook. I keep getting notifications about new messages on Facebook, or comment posts. When the phone is updated I'm also updated.*

**Bina:** *Every day, a proximally 6 hours in a day, listening to music and communicating with other people consistently.*

**Hana:** *I use Facebook every single day, in fact all the time. Thanks to my Android mobile, I am online 24/7.*

**Rojin:** *I am usin Facebook at least once a day.*

### **3. What meaning does joining Facebook give you as a Kurd?**

**Rahel:** *As a Kurd it means a lot to me to join Facebook, because the way it gives me an opportunity to show the world; who I am, what is my nationality, my story and my people's suffering. It is especially important for me to show the world that I'm Kurd through Facebook. In this way, one can they are Kurds are proud of their identity.*

**Serkar:** *I have the ability to learn about important political, social, economic, and trivial events that concern the Kurds and Kurdistan. Facebook gives me the opportunity to follow Kurdish society critics, thinkers, and enlightened Kurds.*

**Valan:** *It is important for me to show that Kurds exists and they are a part of the world's population with their own identity, language, culture and belonging. As a Kurd it is very important for me to stand against each attempt of falsification of our culture and identity, past and present, on Facebook.*

**Sazan:** *It means a lot. Through such a social media one can easily give their opinions and views on issues and topics which are about the Kurdish question and the community. Facebook for me has been the perfect place to present myself as a Kurd and to show my non-Kurdish friends what my culture is and what Kurdistan is.*

**Hezan:** *I participate on Facebook as a Kurd, has no special feeling in itself. But the feeling that I can be in contact with other Kurds on Facebook is very good. For we are not a united nation yet, we are divided in four countries, and the idea that we can keep the communication through Facebook is very nice and important to me.*

**Bina:** *It is important to stand out as a Kurd, to show belonging and Kurdish identity. Also for using a platform there we can discuss any developments and changes that could be helpful for the Kurdish issue. Facebook has in certain extent a meaning for me as Kurd, because by living in Norway far from homeland, Facebook is the only place where I can participate in the Kurdish community if I want to. I can meet other Kurds, share information about Kurds and be updated about things that have to do with Kurds and Kurdistan.*

**Hana:** *As a Kurd I think that social media generally, and Facebook specifically is a great bridge between me and other Kurds from both my home country and also Kurds in diaspora. We as Kurd are very sensitive for our nation, because of our history background and not least our lack of state. Geographically Kurds are separated into four countries. Even though we have one language, one way of thinking (generally), one purpose of life which is getting back Kurdistan, we still don't know so much about each other. Facebook is therefore a bridge between Kurds in different countries. I know way more about Kurds in all the parts of Kurdistan and in Diaspora than my parents do. The reason is simply Facebook. I feed my brain with many great Kurdish poems that people publish, and the great music and also information about Kurdish history.*

**Rojin:** *I like to follow Kurdish events, reading poems and stories in Kurdish and keep in touch with friends and family. I am also member of a Kurdish student organization at the University of Bergen. I need to pay attention and be updated about new messages, meetings, events that will be posted in the different groups which are controlled by our organization.*

**4. Are you in contact with more Kurds than non-Kurds on Facebook? If so, why?**

**Rahel:** *It depends. In some periods I can be more in contact with Kurds than non-Kurds, and this is primarily due to topical incidents, for example spontaneous incidents in Kurdistan, and then it is natural to spend more time together with Kurds to obtain information and discuss the situation. Otherwise I am in contact with everyone, both Kurds and non-Kurds.*

**Serkar:** *No, I'm pretty much in contact with people from different nationalities, including the Kurds.*

**Valan:** *Usually we all have something in common, but I'm in contact with more Kurds than non-Kurds because we have a common cultural background, identity, and belonging, and it is usually easier to communicate with Kurds than non-Kurds because we usually share same thoughts and opinions on topics of Kurdistan.*

**Sazan:** *Yes, because I feel more belonging with the Kurds than I do with non-Kurds.*

**Hezan:** *Yes it is true, because the place I lived and was raised, many other Kurds lived, including Kurds from the same city, town and village. Therefore, I had more Kurds as friend through time, than non-Kurds, thus I have more Kurds on my Facebook friends list than non-Kurds.*

**Bina:** *No, actually I'm not. The reason may refer to where you live and what environment you are in and my environment allows the same opportunities to become familiar with non-Kurds as to Kurds.*

**Hana:** *Yes. The reason is the distance. The non-Kurds on my Facebook are mostly my colleagues and people I have been studying with in Norway. I meet most of them all day weeks. But, the ones who I don't meet often and whom I need to in connect with are my Kurd friends and my families in homeland and Diaspora which are Kurds. I recently was reunited with some of my old friends from the primary school I attended in Kurdistan. Some of them managed to find me and start to communicate with me*



*through Facebook messaging, and then I started to link to other friends whom I knew at the same time. Facebook suggested that I may know some of the people after I was connected with the first friend I talked to. This connection with my old friends gave me a good feeling and reminded me of old days I spent with them in Kurdistan: funny memories we shared in the classroom, things we had been through together, friendship problems and gossip conversations we had together, and even the sad moment when we said goodbye the time I left my homeland and came to Europe. I actually started to look in my old albums which I brought with me from Kurdistan, and found many old pictures taken with my friends at school and during our free time together. It was really nice to have the ability to talk to my old friends in this way and share all our old pictures with each other through Facebook. The last time I remember we had long-distance communication was through paper letters which took months to arrive.*

**Rojin:** *I have contact with my Norwegian friends, including some other friends with from other countries. But most of my friends in Facebook are Kurds, because I find it better to communicate with my Kurds friends as we share the same ethnic identity.*

**5. What do you discuss with other Kurds on Facebook? Why is this important to you?**

**Rahel:** *I discuss a lot of things with other Kurds, but the discussions are mostly about the situation in Kurdistan, political issues, and the future of an independent Kurdistan. The last mentioned is particularly important for me since I want to make most Kurds in the diaspora aware of the issue of an independent Kurdistan. This is particularly important if we want international recognition, since a strong facade that Kurds in the diaspora provide will have a greater impact on the world community than what Kurds in Kurdistan manage.*

**Serkar:** *The discussions are mainly about the developments in Kurdistan, the politics that Kurds engage in, and the advantages and disadvantages of political elections. It is important to discuss the political because it has a strategic impact on us Kurds in the future and current situation. This leads to us sharing thoughts and making opinions about how the development is going on. Those types of discussions also provide a broader understanding about where the Kurds are headed to.*

**Valan:** *We discuss everyday about various topics related to Kurdistan and the Kurdish population. I seldom participate in discussions that are not related to Kurdistan. We discuss about everything that has to do with Kurdistan, Kurdish history, geography, culture, identity, heroes, genocide, martyrs and etc. It is important for me to share my experiences and viewpoints, also to hear other viewpoints. I actively participate in group discussions on Facebook. I think it's really educational. We learn to share views, we learn to discuss without worrying.*

**Sazan:** *I'm discussing mostly about what goes on in Kurdistan currently and everything that has to do with Kurdistan. This is important to me because I want many Kurds as possible to be more active and more engaged in their country and its culture and what is happening there. And to show other young people that they should dare to show them and discuss about the society and culture they come from.*

**Hezan:** *Usually I use Facebook very actively to discuss political issues with my friends, and we discuss mostly the Kurdish issue from all angles, but since I have most*

*friends from North-Kurdistan, we focus on what is happening in Kurdistan in the north, thus in the Turkey area. That's as far as the part that is most suppression, relative to other countries, when we discuss other countries' political systems.*

**Bina:** *I usually discuss different things about Kurdistan, such as music, culture, religion, the Kurdish issue and things happening in the area where I live. It is important to talk with other Kurds that have common interests, such as Kurdish organizations, like Kurdistan Student Union that I'm a member of and community areas.*

**Hana:** *The discussion between me and my friends is more likely to be about ourselves. For example, what we do in our days, the news about ourselves, our family, etc. On the other hand, you have the discussion between me and a group. There are many Kurdish groups, both politically, cultural and socially, where we often share and discuss our ideas. The discussions that I participate in are more about helping people in need. For example, now I am a member of a group who helps the Kurdish children in Western Kurdistan. We discuss what we can do to help them, and how exactly we can do that.*

**Rojin:** *I am not so active in discussion through Facebook. But I do respond in groups belonging to the student organization and other groups that I am member of. I use to participate in discussion about meetings or making plans for events that often are debated on Facebook groups. Then I participate in discussions and possibly answer if I should attend one meeting or arrangement, or what I can contribute.*

## **6. Do you feel fellowship with other Kurds you talk to? Why or why not?**

**Rahel:** *I feel fellowship in terms of that we all have same wish for an independent and free Kurdistan, so yes I do have this feeling. But otherwise it is infrequent to find a diversity of Kurds in diaspora that may have the same understanding of Kurdistan, and political ideologies often become an obstacle to formation of such a fellowship. Thus, the final measure of free Kurdistan can be somewhat weakened.*

**Serkar:** *Yes because we are the countrymen and the Kurds are my people. I mean thinking in this way creates a sense of fellowship that we Kurds desperately need. It is important with this approach and I think that the Kurds should be able to reject "us and them" attitude for a get to some place.*

**Valan:** *Yes of course I feel fellowship with other Kurds on Facebook. Without this fellowship feeling Facebook has no importance to me. I have a sense of belonging to a national community and cohesion. I notice that Kurdish national feeling is getting even stronger, especially among the younger generation in the Kurdish diaspora. I notice that in many group discussions on Facebook. Earlier many Kurds denied their identity, but now I feel like this has changed and they have gained a new consciousness of themselves as a Kurd. They are more conscious of their own culture, identity, and language. Such discussions are often debated on Facebook.*

**Sazan:** *Yes of course. I feel like Kurds understand me better and deeper. The communicating with them is getting more interesting and the feeling of nationalism is spreading more and more, when you know the person you are talking to share the same interests and cultural values and have the same history and traditions like you.*

**Hezan:** *The fellowship is actually there all the time when one is talking to someone from their peoples, and this feeling is a little stronger if one is Kurd, I think. Like I said earlier, we are divided between four countries but we can keep in touch with each other despite this division, and that is something very valuable I think. Therefore, we feel more fellowship with our people. For example, when I am in a discussion with Kurds, no matter from which part, I feel the fellowship than I do with others, ie with non-Kurds.*

**Bina:** *Yes, I do and there is a good feeling, it strengthens and makes my affiliation more proven.*

**Hana:** *Yes I do. I often call Facebook as my second home. The reason is simply the way we have been used to it. Using Facebook 24/7 makes you feel home, and makes the friends your family members. Because of the distance between me and my family and friends in my homeland and in other countries in Europe, I find Facebook as a useful and important platform for communication. And of course the connection I have made with friends outside of Norway, which I have met in Kurdish conferences and travels, Facebook strength the fellowship between us.*

**Rojin:** *Yes, I feel fellowship with the Kurds, when it comes to subjects about the Kurdish question, because what Kurds go through is something that concerns all Kurds together. But I am not that interested in politics, so I do not always agree with the most discussions that are spoken in Facebook groups, but I do follow everything happening in Kurdistan.*

**7. Have you experienced problems through Facebook because of your ethnic identity? If yes, what kind of problems?**

**Rahel:** *I have not yet experienced any problems on Facebook because of my identity, but I know many who had their profile deleted because they had published a map of Kurdistan, the Kurdish flag, and pictures of Kurdish political leaders. I have actively shared the Kurdistan map and Kurdish flag but have so far not encountered any problems.*

**Serkar:** *Luckily, I have not experienced any problems on Facebook beyond that I have ended up in some heated discussions with Turks who do not have an anti-Kurdish attitude. This has created some problematic discussions where many ruthless things have been said about Kurds, and there has been extensive use of control techniques against we who support the pan-Kurdish.*

**Valan:** *I have experienced that several times. I used to discuss the conflict about Kurdistan and Turkey with Kurds and Turks on various Facebook groups, and it always ended with disagreement and even quarrel. Then my Facebook account usually got removed by Facebook administration. Turks were good at reporting my posts. They even used to write visible messages to each other reporting my posts, so my Facebook account used to be blocked and removed. My Facebook account has been removed at least five times, as far I can remember. My Facebook it is profile was even hacked by Turks; they posted pictures of the Turkish flag and Turkish president in my profile. But I've stopped discussing with the Turks through Facebook, instead I discuss with Kurds living in different countries in Diaspora and with some Norwegians. I notice that I get a more real picture of discussing with the Kurds and other ethnic groups than Turks.*

**Sazan:** *Until now I have not experienced anything like it. There have been misunderstandings, but they have not led to any major problems. It has either come to a common agreement or each side has accepted the other's opinions and speculation.*

**Hezan:** *Yes, I have experienced that many times. I have experienced that some of my posts on Facebook have been removed automatically without my being told or warned*

*about it. Last time this happened was two weeks ago when I posted an article about what is happening now in Istanbul, in Taksim. The post was not racist at all; it was plain criticism and a little history about Turkey. The next day I found out that the article does not exist anymore on my Facebook wall. It is the case that Facebook has set up a rule on the use of Kurdish flags; they have removed users who have used the Kurdish flag or posted racist things about Turkey and Atatürk. That's very sad that something like that could happen on Facebook. Facebook is, as far as everyone knows, against all dictatorial systems, but that they themselves introduce such a rule is absolutely pathetic.*

**Bina:** *Yes, I have experienced problems. For example, when someone shares articles from other websites and online newspapers that write about Kurdish religion and culture, which can lead to disagreements and lack of understanding, and this can be*

**Hana:** *No, because I haven't participated in any groups which are against Kurds. I am not politically active on Facebook because those who often have complications on Facebook are those who participate actively in political discussions and groups, and often share their opinion of things said against Kurds.*

**Rojin:** *No, I've never had any problems because of my ethnic identity because I am very passive when it comes to political discussions. I don't remember when I last participated in a political discussion on Facebook.*

**8. Do you participate in political discussions on Facebook? What is spoken about in political discussions on Facebook?**

**Rahel:** *I participate very often in political discussions on Facebook. Such discussions revolve mainly around the situation in Kurdistan and current occasions, as mentioned previously. In addition, such discussions revolve around whether a free Kurdistan is reality, or whether it is possible for parts of Kurdistan. Such things are very often discussed.*

**Serkar:** *No not anymore. I discuss it most with my close friends through private conversations on Facebook, and topics are mainly about the current political situation. We discuss everything from the situation in the North and the retreat there, also about West and how Kurds who lives there can ensure its autonomy and the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) policy toward its neighbors and Kurdish movements from other parts.*

**Valan:** *Yes I do that almost every day. I mostly discuss the current situation in Kurdistan. I find it so instructive to participate in political activities on Facebook. I learn more and more every time I discuss certain themes with others. We usually have disagreements, which are actually the point, but in the big picture, I think we share a similar basic attitude. Sometimes it can be a little uncomfortable when we are very disagreeing, but we respect each other even if we have disagreements with each other.*

**Sazan:** *Sometimes. If I feel like this is something I can help with and I know something about, then I participate in political discussion. The discussions have simply everything that has to do with politics. For example how politicians have managed to do something rational for Kurdistan in recent years, why did they do it and not, what would have happened if they did this instead something else, what is the best thing they can do for Kurdistan, why haven't we so far managed to get an independent country and what can be done in the future to make this happen, etc. All this and more are discussed in political discussion.*



**Hezan:** *We know that there are many groups on Facebook where you have everything from music, politics, religion, culture and many other things. It's very simple to create a Facebook group and add people there. I usually go and find those I have a common interest with. One experience I had was two months ago, when I created a group of Kurds from the North, to be gathered and only to discuss political issues. Experience shows that you do not always success with it, because people have different views, different values and different religions and it can quickly lead to an actual regret for having created such a group and discuss the things that make you to dislike a Kurd simply. And I'd rather not to that and I would not dislike one from my country. But if you have very different interests and not as ambulatory person, so you can quickly fall by a discussion.*

**Bina:** *No, I don't participate in political discussions on Facebook.*

**Hana:** *No, I don't participate in political discussions because it not my strongest interest.*

**Rojin:** *No, I almost never participate, but I will do as my duty as a Kurd, if I have to. Sometimes I follow some discussions and participate if it is in my interest.*

**9. Do you feel associated to other Kurds who you are in contact with on Facebook? Why or why not?**

**Rahel:** *As mentioned earlier, I feel an association to other Kurds mainly because we share the same goal, to get a free Kurdistan. Otherwise, one can be more related to the Kurds who come from the same town/area, and I think it is naturally.*

**Serkar:** *Yes some of them, because we share the same interest for the Kurdish question, I think that our situation is highest political and therefore I'm interested in talking with Kurds who are interested in the same thing. I feel connected with those who have a good overview of the situation in Kurdistan and who manage to lead an interesting and enlightening discussion. It is not important for me that we have the same thought or political affiliation. Most important is that we discuss and try to understand a different perspective regarding Kurdistan.*

**Valan:** *Yes, because we have a strong association to Kurdistan, the situation in Kurdistan and the Kurdish people.*

**Sazan:** *Yes, as I said earlier they are of my own culture, same tradition, religion and same language. Even though Kurdish language has different dialects, but it doesn't matter to me, it is still the same language and I like to get to know those who speak another dialect than I do. It makes me to feel how rich and deep my native language is, and I want to learn all dialects.*

**Hezan:** *Yes, I feel that. Those I have as friends on Facebook, are friends I share common interests with, those I do not want to share a common interest with, I simply remove from my Facebook profile. Because if you have the face to see each other all the time, then you have to avoid offending, but those who share the same interest with me, but also provokes me all the time I clearly just remove them from my Facebook friend list. I have therefore only Kurds who share the same common interest and the same political viewpoint on my Facebook. I do not expect the same common interests and the same political views from a non-Kurdish person. But if there is an ethnic Norwegian person, then I always try to be understanding, for they have not the same interests and the same political views as me, and also have no need for it.*

**Bina:** *I do feel associated when I'm talking with other Kurds on Facebook. There is a bonus with social media, where you easily get in touch with old friends and family members. It maintains regular contact that was difficult before, and therefore the communication on Facebook makes a strong connection between me and other Kurds.*

**Hana:** *Of course I do feel associated with other Kurds. The associating is the only thing we Kurds have between us to reinforce to our homeland and connect with each other. I feel that associating with other Kurds make us stronger as a stateless nation and help us to rebuild and take back our ethnic identity which has been taken from us.*

**Rojin:** *Yes, because we're talking in Kurdish to each other and there is a strong associating sense.*

**10. Do you have a sense of belonging when you are in contact with other Kurds on Facebook? Can you describe the feeling, or an experience?**

**Rahel:** *The sense of belonging is very strong when I meet Kurds who share the same goals as me, and that they simply look into the future and put problems in perspective. I am very strongly influenced when I meet Kurds who have managed to get out of political ideologies and is not supporting any political parties, but rather working for the final goal, namely an independent Kurdistan.*

**Serkar:** *It is both negative and positive. The Kurds that have a strong bond to Kurdistan and showing their Kurdish identity clearly, makes me very proud and gives me hope that we are moving towards an appropriate development. While those who deny its identity makes me sad and I get ashamed of such Kurds. Those give me a feeling that we still have a very long way to go before it can be any device.*

**Valan:** *There are many forms of belonging that are important for a person. National identity is crucial for me when I am in contact with other Kurds on Facebook. Knowing that one belongs to a realm, a nation is something one cannot deny. This feeling of belongingness is especially visible on Kurdish National Day, or important events in Kurdish history, or the tragedies that frame Kurds.*

**Sazan:** *Nationalist feeling first and foremost. I feel that something is tying us together, although I do not know a person, but there is still a feeling that makes the connection and understanding.*

**Hezan:** *When a Kurd posts a picture of Kurdistan, a Kurdish map, or an image of a place in Kurdistan, my heart beats faster just because I feel the sense of belonging to it, because I'm a Kurd and from Kurdistan. Although we do not have an independent country and although we are not together, we have retained our culture one hundred percent. Therefore, people are more Kurdish, in a way, when you share the kind of image or text about Kurdistan or the Kurdish issue. I feel more affinity through the sharing of things that have to do with Kurdistan, by me and others on Facebook.*

**Bina:** *I feel a sense of belonging when I join a Kurdish group on Facebook that I like and they share the same interest as me. It makes me feel that I'm with my own people, and this gives me a sense of national belonging and identity. I get this feeling when people share interesting posts about Kurdistan, like new and old information, that I learn something from either way.*

**Hana:** *When I talk to someone on Facebook who lives in Kurdistan and they tell me the details of what they are doing, how they live, where they go, etc., in that very special moment I feel like I am with them. It feels like I belong at home, and it feels like I really want to go back home. When my friends share a photo of a special Kurdish food, of a natural image of motherland, my feelings go back to my home country and I feel like I belong there. Besides that, I often talk about Kurdistan and share posts and pictures with my friends for it gives us the sense of belonging to something we have in common.*

**Rojin:** *I sense the belonging with other Kurds because we come from the same place, we speak the same language, and we share the same culture and tradition.*

**11. How do you convey your Kurdish identity through Facebook? (Images, cultural production, political symbols, etc.). Does this lead to a community between you and other Kurds?**

**Rahel:** *I'm able to convey my Kurdish identity through photos, discussions, quotes, newspaper articles, etc. on Facebook. I feel that this is counted as positive and I manage to create a community with most of the Kurds.*

**Serkar:** *I have some ideal of Kurdish people on my Facebook profile. I don't have pictures or symbols of party affiliation. I also post images I find aesthetically pretty and that reach the Kurds from all parts. In addition, as I put some articles that I find interesting from time to time.*

**Valan:** *I always convey my national identity through for example Kurdish national symbols that create a sense of belonging for me and the Kurdish flag that represent what Kurds stand for. I use the Kurdish flag everywhere on my Facebook profile, and I have many pictures of myself with Kurdish flag. I'm also very good at posting pictures of myself with Kurdish clothes on Facebook. This is about the feeling to be part of a cultural and national community.*

**Sazan:** *Through photos, articles about Kurdistan (mostly English), music, video, poetry (most of the old Kurdish poets), famous quotes and sayings. I use nationalist symbols, but don't like to use political symbols because I feel like it makes a "distinction" between us. Therefore I stick more to the nation and country in general than simple parties and politicians, whom I think, is much more important. The Kurdish flag and a map of Kurdistan is the only (if I may call them) "political symbols" I believe represents Kurdistan and the Kurdish people, not anything else.*

**Hezan:** *I convey it through my sharing on Facebook; I share photos very often, but spend most time writing posts on Facebook. I convey the Kurdish issue through my posts, update people on what's happening constantly, especially on political issues where I know people are not as interested in investigating themselves.*

**Bina:** *I do it through sharing information about Kurdistan, through pictures, articles, music and commenting on posts related to Kurdish people and the generally to Kurdistan.*

**Hana:** *I convey my Kurdish identity in different ways. One of them is through my Kurdish poems. I have been writing poems for many years. I wasn't able to publish them before. But through Facebook and the Kurdish groups that I am member of, I have published them. In that way the Kurdish people are able to read them. Kurdish poetry is one of the oldest belongings of Kurdish culture and plays a crucial role in Kurdish ethnic identity. I want to be one of those people who keep the poetry alive and send it to the next generation. I also convey it through my scientific articles which are about medical subjects. I write them in Kurdish so people are able to read them in their own language. I like to share my knowledge with my fellowmen, so they can have a benefit of it.*

**Rojin:** *Everyone on my Facebook friend list knows that I am a Kurd. I have many pictures with Kurdish costumes with friends, where the picture was taken during a Kurdish party or a national celebration, not to mention the picture of the Kurdistan flag. There are several videos of us from the student organization including the national parties, demonstrations, cultural evening, seminars, etc. This leads to communion between me and other Kurds, and I thereby convey my Kurdish identity through sharing those.*

**12. What do you think is most important to convey about your identity as a Kurd?**

**Rahel:** *For me it is first and foremost very important to convey my story to the whole world. Throughout history, the world can see who the Kurds are, and what kind of sufferings they have gone through in the struggle for freedom. A quote by Confucius proofs the importance of the story conveying, "Study the past if you would define the future." The story is what defines the future, and thus I have emphasized this to convey my identity as a Kurd.*

**Serkar:** *I have always meant and still mean that all the awful truth that Kurds have suffered need to be revealed, but not lavish newsfeed with a lot of updates since it can be really disturbing to others perhaps. I do not shudder away to write and protect the Kurdish issue if something offensive is said about the Kurds on Facebook. I always show that I am a proud Kurd and provide resistance when something unfair is being said about the Kurds.*

**Valan:** *The Kurds have gone through genocide incidents and tragedies all the part of Kurdistan. At the same time the Kurds have been the rulers and ruled over large parts of Mesopotamia since 4,000 years ago. They have also fought against major powers. By this I mean that the Kurds must first and foremost have the knowledge, awareness and understanding about its own history, culture, identity and belonging to could be able to understand the Kurdish current situation no matter where in Diaspora they are. Without knowledge, we cannot spread out very much. In addition to this, we stand against every fraud attempts on our history.*

**Sazan:** *Everything that has to do with Kurdistan and the Kurdish culture. It is really simple straightforward and positive way, to be able to convey something you desire and thinks that others should have some benefit from.*

**Hezan:** *I think everything from watching and sharing photos and listening to Kurdish music is nice, but what is most important for me, is reading political texts and posts, because through that we can convey the Kurdish issue. It is also important to write short texts, so that people can bear to read it at all. I think the most important thing is*



*to update people with text, a picture can certainly tell a lot but not as much as a text in such cases. For example, a few weeks ago I saw one picture of a Kurd who was hanged in Iran in the middle of Tehran, it's terrible, and no text could tell what the picture could tell us. There is one thing, but another thing is if you update people on why the person was hanged, how the person was hanged, what was the case, then you need to read a text about the case. Image with text is optimal, and conveys the whole story, but at the same time can cause inconvenience, because people will only see the picture but not reading the text. But if you have only plain text, then the text will be in focus. So you have to use Facebook in a very systematic organized way, and convey what you want in the way you want people to understand.*

**Bina:** *The important thing this to just be apart the Kurdish environment on Facebook no matter how, when or who. It is important to join everything we can find interesting and important to Kurdistan. When you take a part in things on Facebook, like commenting, writing and sharing pictures and posts, then you do convey something somehow.*

**Hana:** *The most important things to convey are sharing Kurdish music, poems, pictures and articles written in Kurdish. The Kurdish language is very rich because of its many dialects, therefore it is important to use that language in Facebook. It is also important to convey it through news about current situation in Kurdistan, so everyone can be updated on that.*

**Rojin:** *If you had asked me this question a few years ago, I could probably not give you the same answer as I will give now. Because was not very interested in similar questions about conveying my Kurdish identity. But as of today, I think it is my duty to convey the Kurdish identity, history, tradition and culture, since there is little attention in the world about the Kurds and Kurdistan.*

### **13. What more would you say about the importance of Facebook?**

**Rahel:** *Facebook is an important weapon in the fight against oppression. If the Kurds in Diaspora manage to successfully exploit this powerful tool, we manage to get people in the world to be aware of our situation. In addition, the Kurds should be more adept at grouping in official groups that aims to convey knowledge about the situation in Kurdistan, and with enough people in such groups, it can quickly get the attention of foreign media. It is not without reason that the first thing dictators do at the beginning of demonstrations, is to shut down the internet and access to Facebook.*

**Serkar:** *Facebook is primarily a social pornography and a medium for trivial sharing. But it allows the people to keep in touch and also be known with each other.*

**Valan:** *Facebook has become a place where one can send and get the message to the target audience. I think that through Facebook, the world has been presented as a more realistic picture. For example without Facebook or other social media we could never get the real picture of the Arab world. People have given out the message to the world community and forced some dictatorships to resign. It would not be the same if Facebook or other social media was not available. Through Facebook people presenting other aspects of reality, for example the thing that is specified in the Kurdish world.*

**Sazan:** *If you can use it in a sensible way and know why you are using it, then it is very decent. It is an easy way to keep in touch with friends and families you have not been in contact with for years and getting to know many new ones that have similar interests and opinions through friends of friends, or participate in a group. Facebook has made things much easier for us who live in the Diaspora, both personally and nationalist generally.*

**Hezan:** *Facebook for me as a normal person is relatively important place in comparison with other existing things in my life, like listening to music, going for a walk, and watching a movie. I'm mostly on Facebook, because there I have all my friends that I can update of. However, as a Kurd Facebook is very important for me, because we know that during the Arab spring, so much could not happen in the*

Arabic countries if it was not because of Facebook. People communicated through Facebook and were organized through Facebook. Earlier Kurds used to keep their opinions to themselves, and could only affect the people they had around them. But on Facebook we can affect a large amount of people that we actually do not see every day. We can affect people who live on the other side of the world through Facebook. People not always have time to read all the newspapers every day, nor does interest in it and not everyone have culture of reading a book or a newspaper every day. We Kurds are weak in many areas, and one of them is reading. Therefore, it is important to update others through Facebook about what is happening today, especially the Kurds from Turkey and Iran are experiencing very much that the media is manipulated. For example, what one sees in a Turkish TV channel, is not actually what happens, they never tell what is true, what are the facts. Therefore, we should update people with line of what actually happens, thus Facebook is very important to me as a Kurd and for all Kurds in Diaspora, because they can keep in touch via Facebook.

**Bina:** Facebook is important in many ways, especially to Kurds. We can be associated with other Kurds, old and new friends, families and relatives. And of course sharing and getting new information about incidents in Kurdistan and in diaspora where the Kurds live.

**Hana:** There is one more thing that I want to say about the use of Facebook. True enough that Facebook takes defiantly very much time of mine. But people can decide themselves if they want to use it as a useful tool and update themselves or not. For me as a Kurd it has been the most important communication tool to use, and I chose to use it in a reasonable way, by expressing my Kurdish identity in those ways I am able to. Because it is important for the Kurds to show their existence to the rest of the world and Facebook is a good start.

**Rojin:** I think that Facebook is very useful, especially to keep in touch with all family members, relatives, and friends, wherever they are located. I recently came back from a group travel with many other Kurds and I became friends with many nice people, but they unfortunately live in different countries. But thanks to Facebook I have managed to keep in touch with everyone and keep the friendship alive.